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CHARACTER AND OPINIONS

OF

WILLIAM LANGLAND,

AS SHOWN IN

"The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman."

THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF
NEW JERSEY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

BY

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IN THE

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Introduction.

The special purpose of this investigation is to give an exposition of the character and teaching of him whose work preëminently, as compared with that of other writers of the fourteenth century, reflects the opinions of the common people. Chaucer, Gower, and Wyclif represent each a distinct phase of life as well as of thought; but all are on a plane removed from that of Langland. He too was a scholar, but a humble one, and he remained ever in close sympathy with the humble; his ideas were either the ideas he received from them, or those which they were eager to receive from him, as is attested by the popularity of his work when written. For this reason the results herein arrived at may be supposed to index in some sort the mental life of English people of the lower ranks.

The references to texts A, B, and C, respectively, are in every case to the parallel edition of the three texts as published by the Clarendon Press, 1886, in the first of the two volumes of that edition. Volume II. of the same edition is referred to as the "Notes." *R* refers to the poem "Richard the Redeless" as included in Volume I. of the same edition. The other references are given in full, or are self explanatory.

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Character and Opinions of William Langland.

Author of "Piers the Plowman."

The Scene of the Poem.

Relation to the central subject of inquiry.

Before taking up the central subject of investigation, I wish to consider the scene of the poem and its relation to Langland's life; because, in this case, such an investigation promises to throw some light upon the unsettled question as to whether Langland ever received a university training, and thus partly to account for the nature of his thinking and teaching.

So far as the known facts of his life are concerned, they may be summarized in a few words. These facts are that Langland was born of respectable parentage at Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire at about 1332; that his father, Stacy de Rokayle, afterward removed to the parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood in Oxfordshire; that the child was baptized in infancy, sent early to school, and loved it so that he determined to be a student all his life, and a scholar according to his opportunities. Here rises the question suggested, as to the nature of those opportunities, and whether access to one of the universities was among them. Professor Ten Brink believes it "most probable" that Langland received a university training, perhaps at Oxford.* If this were true, the poem should exhibit, in addition to a technical knowledge of certain subjects, a reflection of university life in allusions and scenes described.

But whatever may be the conclusion, after our investigation is completed, as to the nature and extent of Langland's training, it is certain that he became a student, and eventually a humble member of the secular clergy; that he married, and spent his life in performing the duties of his profession, studying the Vulgate and the world about him, drawing conclusions from the one, and applying them to the other.

This seems a simple enough matter, but Langland's conclusions and his manner of enforcing them were not as those of other men. The

*Ten Brink, Early Eng. Lit., p. 352.

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church of the fourteenth century was a huge machine. Not in organization and government only, but in its methods of preaching and interpreting the Scriptures all was formal and mechanical; the preacher spoke according to rule, often anxious only for the completion of his task, and careless whether the seed thus idly sown should spring up or wither away. Careless whether his flock did or did not follow his teaching, the churchman became careless in regard to following it himself. To formalism succeeded hypocrisy, and open neglect even of formal duties; the church preyed upon the people, and became in turn a refuge for those who sought to escape hardship and make a living easily.

Why the poem was written.

Langland entered the church because he preferred the contemplative to the active life. His studies revealed to him not so much new teachings as the fact that the old ones had not been properly applied and enforced. He dared to speak, but the number of those whom he might address personally was very small; and had Langland been simply the faithful priest, we should know as little of him as of a thousand others who have kept the church spiritually alive, when it was most corrupt. But his longing to set forth the truth was not to be satisfied by the performance of daily duty alone; in his otherwise unoccupied hours, his recreation was to write what was in his thoughts, at first, doubtless, without thinking that this work of his leisure was to possess value or importance, but afterward in the full realization of all that it might accomplish. Thus we may interpret his statement that the work is the solace of his lighter hours, through which he strengthens himself for his more serious duties, though he would willingly forsake it if he knew how better to employ the time (B, XII., 20 ff.) But we may detect a growing feeling that the work is worthy, that it is in harmony with his own teaching as to the nature of Dobest; and the omission of even an implied excuse from the final revision of the poem may show his conviction that through it he had accomplished his true lifework.

Relation to author's life.

The three several versions of the poem belong, it is well established, to the years 1362-63, 1377, and about 1393. It would seem that we should be able to learn the complete story of the author's life from versions so widely separated in time, and so full of detail and incident; but instead, we are scarcely able to tell anything in addition to what has been stated, except that he lived in London for the greater part of the time. Local allusions are remarkably few, considering the length of the poem; a fact due to the allegorical structure of the composition; and of these local allusions, fewer still, except those which pertain to the

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city of London, are of such a character as to indicate that the author had personally visited the places mentioned.

Date of coming to London. An interesting question may be asked, the discussion of which must be largely speculative, as to the scene and occupation of Langland's life before he became a resident of London. That he had become somewhat familiar with London before the earliest version of his poem (Text A) was written, is scarcely open to doubt, though were it not for the exceedingly circumstantial and graphic character of a single portion (A, V., 146 ff.), describing a London tavern, it would seem that his familiarity with the city was not so great as to indicate long residence. To me, Text A seems to breathe a spirit of the country; with the exception mentioned, its London allusions are general in character, and might be based upon common report, while many of the characters described were to be met with very often in the country as well as in the city. Perhaps the safest conclusion is that Langland had but recently come to London, and that he was still dominated by the influence of the earlier country life.

In the C-text is found the positive statement, "I haue lyved in London meny longe ȝeres" (C, XVII., 286). It happens that the corresponding passage in the B-text (B, XV., 148), states, "I haue lyved in londe, quod I, my name is Longe Wille;" and while this may be and usually is interpreted as an introduction of the author's own name into the text,—an interpretation justified by precedent, and by other examples in the text itself of playing upon words,—it may also be interpreted as referring to a life in the country, and as meaning that Langland had not yet lived in London so very many years. Still there is no further evidence to show whether he had lived there more or less than fifteen years, (interval from A-text to B-text), and thus to fix the date of his arrival as earlier or later than the A-text, except such evidence as may be gathered from the general atmosphere of the A-text. I conclude that he came to London at about the time that the A-text was written, certainly not much earlier; and that he married at about the same time, as his daughter had arrived at years of understanding when the B-text was written. (B, XVIII., 426).

The standpoint of the A-text is certainly in the country. The author places himself there three times in as many visions, (A, prologue, 10: A, V., 6: A, IX., 58), and the action of the poem is also in the country, with the exception of certain episodes. The "field full of folk," and the marriage of Meed, are in the country; the trial of Meed transports us to Westminster, but we return again to the field of folk, the preaching of Reason, and the appearance of Piers Plowman, who

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could not well be other than a countryman. The penitents are from both city and country.

The chief distinction between the A-text and the C-text in respect to scene is, that in the latter London dominates. Further, in the C-text, the author awakes in London after going to sleep on Malvern Hills (C, VI., 1), goes to sleep again in a London church (C, VI., 108), and wakes again in time to see the sun set in the south from Malvern Hills (C, X., 294). This inconsistency, due to the interpolation of new matter, would seem to furnish some evidence touching the place of composition of each version; but the value of the evidence is destroyed by the fact that the B-text, which was evidently written after the London residence had begun, is here in acccord with the A-text, instead of the C-text, as it should be if the change noted were due to a change of residence.

Though the A-text has more to do with the country than with the city, the argument that it might have been written before Langland had become thoroughly familiar with London has to offset it the fact that the allusions to places in London are more specific than those to places in the country, and more numerous as well. Malvern Hills may be definitely located; and the field full of folk may be near them; so too may be the half acre of Piers Plowman; but supposition is not certainty. On the other hand, Westminster is a definite locality, and so are the various places whose representatives meet Glutton at the tavern, though the tavern itself is not named.

Though we may not therefore fix definitely the time when Langland came to London, it seems evident that in 1362 he was acquainted with both city and country; that he loved the country rather than the city, an allegiance still cherished fifteen years after; and that he had not long forsaken the Malvern Hills for the London streets.

Occupation of earlier years. If Langland spent much of the earlier part of his life in the country, as seems reasonable, it becomes of interest to ask how it was spent. He shows entire familiarity with the plowman's life, his duties, and even his food at the several seasons of the year. No others of his descriptive passages are so minute and so evidently accurate as those relating to rustic life and labor. There is, I believe, more than a possibility that the boy Will, before his assumption of clerical dignity, had formed a practical acquaintance with the duties of the farm and the harvest field, and had found them not at all to his taste. The question addressed to him by Reason (C, VI., 12), "'Canstow serven,' he seide, 'or syngen in a churche?'" might indicate that, at the time Langland had in mind, he had not yet become in any sense a priest; though before the end of the passage is reached, he is speaking of his long clothes, and

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declares that he lives in London. But he has so often shown a facility in making sudden transitions of thought, that we may still be permitted to think that the reference in the beginning of the passage is to an early time spent in a sort of vagabondage. He also accuses himself elsewhere, and in a very sweeping way, of having devoted altogether too much time to the world, the flesh, and the devil. But on the other hand, the passage quoted may mean only what is distinctly implied in another (C, VI., 91), that Langland was at no time formally attached to priory or minster; and his self-accusation may be a natural expression from one who despises the things of the world. If this be the case, he probably obtained his knowledge of country life upon the farm held by his father, and by later inspection while journeying about in his long robe, as too many clerics were wont to do. The most that can be said is that there is a possibility that some of the days of his youth were wild and idle, and a probability that others of them were spent in acquiring a practical knowledge of seeds and seasons (C, XIII., 177-192), and of farming operations in general (C, XXII).

Inferences from allusions to places.

We may attain to something more of certainty in regard to the scene of Langland's life and labors taken as a whole. The total number of allusions to to places in England outside of London, as tabulated in Professor Skeat's index, is but sixteen; a surprisingly small number. These indicate a general acquaintance with the country lying between Shropshire and London, a territory that is very nearly the geographical center of England; and the places mentioned seldom lie far away from a line drawn from Langland's birthplace to London. Extended to the northwest, such a line would pass near Chester, and to the southeast, not far from Canterbury. A few names carry us from London northeastward into Norfolk; but these are of a general or proverbial character, not usually indicating actual acquaintance. It is otherwise with allusions to places between Shropshire and London. There are also some rather specific references to places in Hampshire, southwest of London; while if we take account of the poem of "Richard the Redeless," Langland in 1399 had passed westward as far as Bristol. Apparently the greater part of his life was spent near London; the earlier part of it in a gradual moving down from the Malvern Hills to London; and perhaps its latest years in a journey westward. Without doubt the entire action of the poem we are to study, so far as that action lies in England, lies between and about London and the Malvern Hills; while of other parts of his country, Langland knew little, save by hearsay.

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The Content of the Poem.

While materials for the history of Langland's outer life are very scanty, as may appear from the preceding discussion, the mass of those bearing upon his inner or mental life is proportionately great, and to give a complete exposition of them would require a volume. The results which follow have been obtained, after tabulation, by endeavoring to compress into a few words the substance of many citations, and to substantiate each point by a single appropriate reference.

1. SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION.

Langland's attitude toward real and pretended science is less satirical than that of Chaucer, perhaps because Langland had given the subject less attention; still in speaking of the arts which pertain to magic, he does express considerable distrust. To the "seven arts" which comprised the circle of scientific knowledge of his time, he twice refers (C, XII., 98; C, XIII., 93); but the character of his work would not indicate that he had been a very diligent student of any of these arts, except perhaps grammar. The seven arts mentioned are the trivium,—grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the quadrivium,—music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy.

It is evident that this circle of arts does not include all human knowledge, nor is it broad enough to cover all the learned allusions made by Langland himself. To make the classification more complete, it will perhaps be best to refer to the source from which popular knowledge upon matters of science and philosophy was largely derived, the "Secretum Secretorum" (Morley, English Writers, IV., 227); a book which Langland appears not to have known. This work is summarized by Gower in the seventh part of the "Confessio Amantis," and his summary may answer our purpose. Knowledge is arranged in three classes, — Theoretic, Rhetoric, and Practic. Theoretic includes theology, physics, and mathematics; mathematics in its turn comprising arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, or the quadrivium. Rhetoric includes grammar and logic, and Practic includes ethics, economics, and politics.

Gower discusses the constitution of created things as if the subject belonged to mathematics rather than to physics. It is necessary also to find a place for alchemy and medicine in the scheme of knowledge before we can give a logical place to Langland's remarks upon those subjects. Perhaps the shortest road is this, that astronomy includes astrology; from astronomy, astrology, and geometry, comes alchemy; and medicine is the application of astronomy, astrology, geometry,

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and alchemy, to unfortunate human beings. Or medicine belongs to the geometrical and astronomical department of mathematics, where Gower discusses it; a conclusion according with that based upon Chaucer's description of the physician (Canterbury Tales, prologue, 411 ff.).*

The Elements. It appears that Langland had no clear idea of any system of knowledge. At least he utterly refused to be bound down by any received system upon any subject, whether because his knowledge of received systems was inexact, or because he cared more for the exactness of his metre and alliteration than for all the systems under the sun. For example, according to Gower and the "Secretum Secretorum," the four elements of things created are earth, air, water, and fire, with a fifth element, *orbis*—the shell which surrounds all the others. Langland in one place gives them as earth, air, wind, and water (C, XI., 129), where he may be using *air* for *ether*, or the heavenly fire (Skeat, Notes, p. 138), and is simply confused by different authorities. In another passage he deliberately drops out *earth*, and for a special purpose substitutes *wit*, making the list wit, water, wind, and fire (C, X., 56).

Alchemy and general sciences. To correspond to Gower's grave discussion of alchemy, and Chaucer's satirical one (Canon's Yeoman's Tale), Langland has a brief and general passage whose subject is the sciences in general, and alchemy among the rest. (B, X., 168 ff.). Dame Study in naming her accomplishments, states that she has taught logic and many other laws, trained Plato and Aristotle, educated children in grammar, and contrived tools for all kinds of crafts. Having thus placed the handicrafts on the roll of sciences, the dame turns her attention to more abstract subjects, and finds of them only Theology really worthy. Yet Theology has puzzled her ten score times; the more she mused thereon, the mistier it seemed, and the deeper she divined, the darker it became. In fact, she concludes, it is no science at all, but a soothfast belief, a matter of faith. Love is its cardinal doctrine, and there is no science under the sun so sovereign for the soul. Then, in comparison with Theology, the other sciences are briefly and finally disposed of as follows:—

> But astronomy is an hard thing, and evil for to know,
> Geometry and geomancy are guileful of speech;
> Whoso thinketh to work with those two thriveth full late,
> For sorcery is the sovereign book that to the science belongeth.
> Yet there are contrivances in caskets of many men's making
> Experiments of alchemy the people to deceive—

*See also Saunders' Chaucer's Cant. Tales, pp. 111-125.

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or as text A here reads (A, XI., 157),

> Experiments of alchemy of Albert's making;
> Necromancy and pyromancy the devil to rise maketh.

Text B continues—

> If thou think to Do Well, deal therewith never;
> All these sciences I myself subtled and ordained,
> And founded them first, folk to deceive.

Astronomy and astrology.

This condemnation of astrology and astronomy is not adhered to consistently throughout the poem. Langland makes use himself of a warning from Saturn, though perhaps satirically (C, IX., 349); he expresses belief in the favorable influence of a constellation (C, XV., 30), and says that Grace teaches astronomers and philosophers to see and say what shall befall (C, XXII., 242); and conversely, the failure of predictions is ascribed to the evil deeds of the people, and their lack of faith (C, XVIII., 96 ff.).

The greater number of allusions pertain to popular beliefs with reference to medicine, and to natural history; the latter doubtless derived from the Bestiaries, Latin and English, except some of the most ordinary facts of observation. There is a somewhat extended discussion of the habits of beasts and birds (B, XI., 326; C, XIV., 143 ff.), based partly on observation and partly on Aristotle at second-hand. Langland mentions the growing of precious stones (A, XI., 12), the cricket's living in the fire, and the curlew on air (C, XVI., 243); and in Richard the Redeless (Passus III), he tells how the hart, by swallowing an adder, renews its youth, and how young partridges forsake their foster mother for the true one.

Medicine.

One of the prominent medical allusions is the mention of triacle (treacle) or salve, the remedy for poisons made from the flesh of vipers (Skeat, Notes, 227) suggesting the principle, Like cures like, which is formulated elsewhere (C, XXI., 158). Precious stones cure diseases and poisons (B, II., 14).* Walnuts, if the shell and bitter bark be removed, will increase the strength and benefit the general health of old men (C, XIII., 144). The virtues of plasters were understood (C, XXIII., 314, 359), sleeping draughts were employed (C, XXIII., 379), and many drugs were in use (C, XXIII., 174). A full list of common diseases is given (C, XXIII., 81) comprising fevers and fluxes, coughs and consumptions, heart spasms, cramps and toothaches, colds and catarrhs, running sores, boils and swellings, agues, "frenzies and foul evils." Leprosy was not unknown (C, X., 179). More terrible than

*C, IX., 189, "And lame men he leeched with lungs of beasts," probably means that the lungs were given for food.

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all was the plague, against which neither "dias" nor drugs nor physicians might avail.

Hygiene. Hunger is a better doctor than any physician (C, IX., 268 ff.), and often Langland gives evidence of faith in diet and hygiene that is refreshing, and not less so that it is based not upon learned treatises, but upon literal interpretation of the Scriptures, and upon common sense. He believes in labor and temperance for the physical health no less than for the spiritual; and if one labor and be temperate in all things, then, says Langland (C, IX., 293),—

The Physician.

"—ich dar legge myn eres
That Fysyk shal hus forrede hodes for hus fode sulle,
And hus cloke of Calabre for hus communes legge,
And be fayn, by my faith, his fysyk to lete,
And lerne to labore with londe leste lyflode hym faile,"

And finally passing from satire to serious earnest,—

"Ther aren meny luthere leches and leele leches fewe,
Thei don men deye thorgh here drynkes er destyne hit wolde."

Langland doubts as does Chaucer, the efficiency of even the best of physicians, and regards them always with a lurking smile. There may be no hint of irreverence in the allusion to "Nedde the fisicien" (A, VII., 170), though the designation looks suspiciously like a modern nickname; or in the account of the conflict of age with a physician (C, XXIII., 176)—

Eld aventured him on Life, and at last he hit
A physician with a furred hood that he fell in a palsy,
And there died that doctor ere three days after;—

but the meaning certainly seems to be that the members of the learned fraternity were ornamental rather than useful. Elsewhere (C, XXIII., 171) we learn that the doctors take gold, good won, and give in return the imaginary protection of a glass hood. Langland has expressed himself more briefly than Chaucer upon this subject (C. T., Prol., 411–444), but not less to the point.

Grammar. Langland's familiarity with the subject of grammar is indicated (C, IV., 335 ff.). He compares Bribery and Reward to the direct and indirect relations in grammar. The substance of this distinction is that reward is what one receives after duty done, that is after conformity to rule, divine or human, the former especially; just as an adjective or substantive accords with its antecedent in gender, number, and case. The bribe is what is received through self-interest entirely, and lack of conformity to rule, such as is seen in the indirect grammatical relation, in which there is lack of agreement in number and case. The meaning of the term, "indirect relation" is not clear; nor was it clear to the king, who states that

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"Englisch was it neuere," (C, IV., 343). The passage is chiefly of interest as showing that Langland was in his later years paying especial attention to the subject, perhaps in connection with the revision of his poem. The passage ends with a comparison of mankind to a substantive, and of Deity to an adjective of "three true terminations."

Langland's interest in grammar is also shown in the B-text (B, XV., 365); he there terms it the "ground of all" and complains that it no longer receives proper attention, unless from children:—no new clerks can versify fair, or formally endite, and not one among a hundred can construe an author in any language but Latin or English. In the corresponding passage in the C-text he omits the implied praise of French, and states only that none can now construe naturally what poets made. In both passages one detects that Langland was very proud of his own knowledge of the theory and practice of this science.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORIES.

As Langland's whole structure rests upon a moral basis, a difficulty arises in making a clear distinction between what is ethical and what is economic. The expressions of his political opinion have reference chiefly to the duties which the several classes of society owe each other in accordance with Scriptural law.*

Classes of Society. Langland's classification of society is fivefold, comprising king, knights, clergy, commons, and plowmen (B. Prol. 112–120). Their general relation to each other is specified as follows (Ibid):—

> Then came there a king, knighthood him led,
> Might of the commons made him to reign;
> And then came kind wit, and clerks he made
> For to counsel the king, and the commons save.

The king, and knighthood, and clergy as well, determined that the commons should provide for themselves, and presumably for the rest; and the commons therefore contrived crafts, and for profit of all ordained plowmen to till and labor. The king and the commons and kind wit the third shaped law and loyalty, that each might know his own.

Text C (I, 139) varies this passage in a manner that is very suggestive. The king reigns not specifically by might of the commons, but "by much might of the men," which may be interpreted to mean knights instead of commons. Instead of the king, it is conscience and kind wit that with knighthood decide as to the first duty of the commons. Lastly, instead of establishing a separate class of plowmen, the commons simply make a plow, which presumably any of

*Compare with the discussion of moral duties.

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them might use. I interpret this to mean that in consequence of the jealousy existing between the king, Richard II., and the commons, and of the uprising of the lower classes under Wat Tyler, Langland, without changing his opinions, so modified this expression of them as to remove any cause of friction there may have been in his original blunt statement.

The sub-classification of the clergy and commons in respect to rank, profession, or trade, is reasonably complete and minute. The most considerable list is given in the description of the field full of folk, (A, Prol.). A general resume is as follows. The religious occupations, professions, or orders, comprise anchorites and hermits, pilgrims and palmers, the four orders of mendicant friars, pardoners, parish-priests, bachelors, bishops, cardinals, and the pope. The commons is resolved into the legal profession with its various grades and officers,—magistrates, sergeants, "sysours and somners, shereyves and here clerks," beadles, bailiffs, advocates (cf. C, III., 59); merchants, petty tradesmen of all sorts, and handicraftsmen, as bakers, butchers, and brewsters many, woollen websters and weavers of linen, tailors, tanners, and tuckers also, masons, miners and delvers, cooks and taverners (A, Prol., 98–109). Then may be added those who live upon others; minstrels, beggars, jesters (A, Prol., 32–40; cf. corresponding passages in B and C).

King. The passage quoted (page 243) names as the fundamental divisions of society, or the three estates, the nobility, the clergy, and the commons. The source of the royal power is laid down in language unmistakable. Then follow specific maxims for kingly guidance, besides the general teaching that may be gathered from the fable of the cat and the rats (B, Prol., 145), and from the poem of Richard the Redeless.

Deriving his power from the commons, he owes to them, in return for service and obedience, "law, love, and lealty," absolute impartiality (C, IV., 381), faithful observance of law (B, Prol., 140), and protection from all enemies. That is, he is recognized as a judge who must be both just and merciful (C, I., 152), an executive, a commander, and in some sense a lawmaker; though as to the latter point, it would appear that he may legislate for the commons by their courtesy rather than by right (B, Prol., 143). As executive, he may claim the help of the commons in enforcing the law, and may not easily succeed without it (C, V., 176). He may also claim of the commons financial support, but should rather ask than demand (C, XXII., 467 ff.). He is subject to the laws as well as charged with their execution, is responsible to the power that created him (the commons) in that he may forfeit their love and respect, though Langland hesi-

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tates to include the right to rule under things forfeitable; and finally he must be guided in all things by the law of God.

Langland's disinclination to advance revolutionary teaching is clearly shown in the fable of the cat and the rats. The rats (burgesses or upper classes) and the mice (lesser commons) have suffered most seriously from the interference of the cat (the king) with their rights of property and personal liberty. But the redress proposed is simply to secure a means of knowing in advance what the movements of the cat will be, ignoring the fact that it would be quite as easy to imprison the cat, or destroy him utterly, as to hang a bell on his neck. Finally a mouse reasons philosophically, in view of the difficulty of carrying out the proposed plan, that submission is best. A king may be bad, is the teaching, but if there were no king, or if his power were more restrained, his subjects might prey upon each other. Even a bad king will maintain peace at home, and will sometimes cease his domestic depredations to prey upon foreigners.

While there is here implied a remonstrance against the impositions of the king (Richard II), Langland's complaint is probably not so much against the enactments themselves as against those who carry them into effect. This is directly stated in Richard the Redeless. Courtiers, retainers, purveyors are all robbers, and the king's chief fault is failure to protect his people against his own creatures.

Knights. Langland pays the order of knighthood the high compliment of making Christ a member of it, who jousted at Jerusalem in defense of humanity. It shares with royalty the duty of defending and protecting the commons against foes, trespassers, and even animals and birds of prey (C, IX., 19-34). Courtesy and physical prowess characterize the knights, rather than intellectual ability; and their first duty is to maintain truth. "Truly to take and truly to fight is the profession and the pure order that appendeth to knights, and whoso passeth that point is apostate of knighthood" (C, II., 96 ff.). Knighthood was established in heaven, and the punishment of Lucifer may serve as a warning to the knight who forsakes his high trust. Only those may receive it rightly who have land and lineage, and are otherwise worthy (C, XIV., 111). Langland is at one with Chaucer in the respect accorded to the order; but this respect does not prevent him from revealing the fact that there are knights base and unworthy, who have purchased their spurs by means of money or influence, and not through any knightly merit (C, VI., 72-79).

Commons. The general status of of the commons has already been defined, in discussing that of the king. Between commons and king stand the magistrates, ministers of the king to interpret the law and enforce its penalty, yet chosen from the commons (A, III.,

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67). To their position they should rise through an educational qualification, we may infer; since Langland apparently believes that this is precedent to any exercise of power, even rightful power. It is the duty of the uneducated rank and file, those who do not understand Latin, to serve and suffer, to accept the words of the king as their law, and to put all their trust in him. Through Latin lies the road of aspirants to participation in government, first in an advisory capacity, and then perhaps in a judicial one; though a judicial position is secured through the will of others rather than one's own inclination. Those who are, through education, competent to act, will see the folly of hasty and inconsiderate action.

The chief good of the commons is, then, to be secured by their resigning the governing power into the hands of natural or chosen rulers, and by fulfilling the precepts of the moral law. The seat of the advisory and judicial power is indicated with reasonable clearness, but it is not so clearly indicated what Langland believes to be the seat of legislative power. He does not say outright that it belongs either to king or commons, but he seems to imply that the power resides in the First Estate (king and nobles) by sufferance of the commons; and this accords with the statement made by Freeman (art. England, Enc. Brit., VIII.), that at this time the form of legislative procedure was for the commons to petition, and the king and lords to enact at their request. Another reason for Langland's silence upon this point is doubtless that in his opinion the law of Holy Writ is sufficient. We detect the spirit of Magna Charta in his work, but we are unmistakably shown that to him the Great Charter is the law of God.

Plowmen. The precise meaning of the term *plowman* in the poem is open to discussion. Is Piers Plowman himself a free tenant, or a villein, the legal restrictions upon whom are thus stated (C. XIII., 61): No churl may make a charter or sell his cattle without the consent of his lord; if he run in debt, or leave his place of abode, he is liable to imprisonment. Langland says that no clerk should be tonsured unless he were come of franklins and free men, and wedded folk (C, VI., 63); but he nowhere makes Piers Plowman a tonsured clerk. Piers proposes, as a free man might, to leave his half acre, and guide the pilgrims to Truth (C, IX); but his absence is apparently not to be permanent. Freeman defines a churl (see reference above) as a member of the lowest class of freemen. This class after the Conquest became fused with that of the slaves into the intermediate class of villeins, who were not slaves in person, but not wholly free in law. It may be that with Langland, the plowman and the churl are the same, but that in describing the one, he is thinking of his

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constantly increasing privileges, and in defining the other, of his exact legal status. Or he may have in mind the distinction pointed out by Skeat (Notes, 169) between the two principal classes of villeins, the first of whom "were allowed many indulgences, and even in some cases, a limited kind of property;" and all of whom, Freeman states, became entirely free by the end of the fifteenth century.

It is evident that by plowmen Langland means laborers attached to the land, because (C, IX., 331) after having described the food and implements of the plowman, he makes a comparison, in the main unfavorable, between him and the "laboreres that han no londe to lyuen on bote here handes;" and it was probably this movable contingent that was in such demand after the pestilence, and concerning whom a law was passed limiting wages, and prohibiting traveling from one parish to another. That Piers has some property rights is shown by his making his will, and in its specifications (C, IX., 95); but still he owes allegiance to his lord Truth, holds under him, and receives from him instructions as well as deputed power.

My conclusion then is that Piers Plowman, as he at first appears, is a villein of the highest class. So far as he has a political significance, it is as a member of the commons; but in the nature of things he can have little until his emancipation is complete.*

Clergy. The office of the clergy is purely spiritual, and though they, especially the higher prelates, do meddle with political matters, they have no business to do so, except in an advisory capacity. Even in the matter of collecting tithes, their authority is non-political. They possess however certain rights of protection over members of their own body and others, illustrated by the right of sanctuary, benefit of clergy, and even the neckverse (C, XV., 129) that may deliver a thief from the gallows.

Economic theories. Economic theories, properly so called, are hardly to be found in the poem; but rather economic facts; though occasionally Langland gives expression to an isolated opinion that has an economic bearing, as for instance the following:

> "In marchaundise ys no mede, ich may it wel avowe.
> Hit is a permutacion a-pertelich o pene-worth for another."

(C, IV., 315). That is, in trade is no reward or bribe, but simply fair and open exchange, presumably taking account of labor involved as well as of the value of the commodities.

The "interesting allegory concerning questions of natural economy" mentioned by Ten Brink (Early Eng. Lit., p. 360) is an allegory concerning the want that preceded the pestilence, and the demand for

*For discussion of the religious significance of the character see topic *Christ as Piers Plowman.*

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labor and the consequent plenty that followed it. Hunger proves himself as good a political economist as he is a physician, in compelling the idle to labor, and in providing food for them and the helpless (C, IX., 171 ff.). After the pestilence, when Hunger slept, laborers refused all but the best of fare and the highest of wages (C, IX., 331). Besides the general recklessness that accompanied and followed the plague (C, XXIII., 150), marriages became frequent and reckless (C. XI., 272), with the most unhappy results. The political conclusions are not far to seek, though Langland does not draw them, contenting himself with the moral ones.

"Seldom mosseth the marble-stone that men oft tread." One should not change craft or religion without good reason, and whether married or single, should not become a "runner about" from one place to another (A, X., 87 ff.).

God provided for man the three necessaries of life,—food, drink, and clothing. These are for all, and should be partaken of, in measure, by all (C, II., 20). He gave the elements to serve man, and hence these, that is wit, water, wind, and fire, should be free to all (C, II., 17; C, X., 55).

Though Langland teaches that Christian men should be in common rich (C, XVII., 43), his indignant renunciation elsewhere of the communistic principle (C, XXIII., 277) must mean that he believes not in actual community of ownership, but rather in reasonable equality; those who have more, caring from their abundance for those who have less.

Langand is also alive to some of the evils and dangers of municipal life (C, IV., 90 ff.). Where the good and evil are so closely associated together, it must often happen that the good suffer with the evil, as well as because of them.*

3. THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHING.

On other subjects Langland may have held reflected opinions; here if anywhere they should be his own. Yet we find little of novelty. His teaching is simply the teaching of the church, but he shows how far from this teaching has diverged the practice of men. This was apparent to many others. Gower too spoke in the "Vox Clamantis" (1381), but not until after the voice of Langland had been heard, and had produced marked results.

Here as elsewhere Langland states his doctrines, whether of theology, religion, or ethics, not systematically, but as they are needed to enforce some practical truth; and it is doubtful whether he had

*The description of the life. of various classes ofsociety, especially the very poor, is of economic importance, but has been fully discussed by Geunther. See "Englisches Leben."

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ever given any attention to the attempt of the scholastics to systematize and explain, though he necessarily made use of their conclusions, as far as they had become a part of the doctrines of the church. In proceeding with the treatment of this topic, I shall aim to separate the formal and doctrinal from the practical.

a. THE SUPERNAL AND THE INFERNAL.

The Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is repeatedly enunciated, with profuse illustration. God is Truth, or His throne is Truth, "the trone that trinity ynne sitteth" (C, II., 134). Belief in the Trinity is the most fundamental of the articles of faith (B, X., 230-238). There are three Persons, but each is God himself, and all are God, and are "nou3ht in plurel noumbre;" yet in the act of creation, God though "synguler hym-self" used the plural verb *faciamus*, thus implying, Langland says, that a greater agency was at work than His word alone (B, IX., 35). God is without beginning; the Son is the savior from death and the devil; the Holy Ghost is of both; and the Trinity is the Creator of man and beast. This is the summary of the "artikle of the feithe;" but this is hard to understand, hence the illustrations elsewhere given..

God in the act of creation, but without the Son and Spirit, would be as a lord who would write letters but lacked a pen and parchment (Ibid.). The three Persons of the Trinity are the three props of the tree of Charity (C, XIX., 1-52). Against the world stands *Potencia-Dei-Patris;* against the wind of the flesh resists *Sapiencia-Dei-Patris*, which is Christ; and *Spiritus-Sanctus* is used to support the tree when shaken by the devil, and also as a weapon to strike him down.

Christ's coat of arms, when he jousts in the armor of Piers Plowman (C, XIX., 188, and parallel passages in B), is three Persons in one banner, each separate from the other, yet one speech and one spirit springeth out of all; there is but one wit and one will, and though "sondry to seo upon, *solus deus* he hoteth." The Trinity is like Christ, Christendom, and the Church, or like Adam, Eve, and Abel, that is husband, wife, and child. Eve proceeded from Adam, and Abel was of them both, yet these three are but one in manhood. So is the Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit of them both (C, XIX., 210-240). Abraham states that God appeared to him as three Persons "goyinge a-thre right by my gate," and in what follows is a curious adaptation of the grammar to the circumstances. Abraham rose up and reverenced God, and right fair greeted *Him*, and washed *their* feet and wiped them. After *they* had eaten, *He* told Abraham and his wife their inmost thoughts (C, XIX., 245).

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The Trinity is like a hand (C, XX., 111-167). The Father is the fist, including the Son and Spirit; the Son is the fingers, and the Holy Spirit the palm. The Trinity is like a candle (C, XX., 168-228) of wax, wick, and fire. The wax and the wick twine together like Father and Son; the fire proceedeth from them both, and of the Three or the One comes the light that serves laborers to see by. It is doubtful whether any of these illustrations are Langland's own.

God. The attributes and function of each Person of the Godhead are specified in connection with the above illustrations, and elsewhere. God as the moral ruler of the universe is Truth. As its creator and physical ruler, He is identified with Nature, or Kynde (C, XI., 151). At the close of the poem, Langland seems for a time to have separated his conception of Nature from that of God (C, XXIII., 80); but even there Nature's ravages cease as soon as men amend, and the agency of God is still apparent (Ibid., 109).

God created man, endowed him with the Holy Spirit, and adapted the earth for his occupancy (B, IX., 33-47; C, II., 17 ff.). God is without beginning, the founder of all things in heaven, having established the orders of angels (C, II., 104). He is the fountain of power and justice, yet commissioned the Son and Spirit to open to men the gates of mercy (C, XX., 111-134, 168-209). His throne upon earth is the heart of man (C. VIII., 254 ff.); he has closed within the castle of the body the soul, which is betrothed to him (C, XI., 132), and has established conscience as a ruler and guardian of the castle. By sin He is concealed from man, as the sun by the clouds (Ibid., 160).

The Holy Spirit. The especial attribute and name of the Holy Spirit is Grace (C, XIX., 52). The Holy Spirit is the Comforter of the holy. As the palm directs the fingers, the Holy Ghost was the Inspirer and Director of the Son upon earth (C, XX., 116).

> The palm is purely the hand, and hath power of himself
> Otherwise than the closed fist, or workmanship of the fingers,
> For the palm hath power to put out the joints
> And to unfold the fist, for to him it belongeth,
> And to receive that the fingers reach, and refuse if him liketh,
> All that the fingers and the fist feel and touch,
> Be he grieved with their gripe, the Holy Ghost lets fall. (C, XX., 140).

When the palm is hurt the hand is useless; a simile which hints at the unpardonable sin (Ibid., 161). If the palm be unhurt, one may help himself, though the fingers ache.

The Holy Ghost converts the power of God into mercy, and the mercy of Christ into forgiveness where repentance is, and there only; otherwise it is ineffectual, as a spark struck from flint and steel, without matches prepared to receive it. It directs men on the road to

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Truth (God) after repentance (C, XXII., 213-228), and besides, teaches them wit and craft, love and humility.

Christ as Piers Plowman.

Christ is mentioned in the poem under two different aspects; in his own proper personality as the Son of God, as in the illustrations already given; and in His human personality as Piers Plowman. Piers is at first a simple plowman, unmistakably such; and at the close of the poem he takes on as unmistakably the character and attributes of the Son of God. But the author has accomplished the transition in a very rude and imperfect manner, full of inconsistencies and contradictions, which he apparently perceived but was unable to remove.

At first the plowman is introduced to show that real knowledge of Divine things is found rather in the humble than in the learned, whom Pride may have turned from the right way. To make the beginning still more simple, it is not Grace that teaches Piers, but the secondary ministers, Conscience and Kyndewit (C, VIII., 184). The allegorical way that Piers points out leads past the various landmarks of the Ten Commandments, to a court or castle, whose moat is Mercy, the wall Wit, the battlements Christianity, and the buttresses Believe-and-be-saved. Within, the houses are roofed with Love and Leal-Speech. The bars are of Obedience, the bridge is Pray-well, each pillar is of Penance and Prayers to Saints, the hooks that the doors hang on are Alms-deeds. Grace keeps the gate; his servant is Amend-you, and at the postern gates the porters are the seven virtues.

He who points out this short and easy way to a Celestial City older than Bunyan's, is at first only a simple hind; but he soon begins to assume something of authority, in response to the request that he act as guide. In yielding to this request, Piers begins to reveal the second and most important aspect of his character, that of teacher. He may not go as guide until he has finished plowing his half acre; and that he may finish the sooner, the seekers after Truth set to work to help him. Yet in this passus (C, IX) it is Hunger rather than Piers that exhibits some of the attributes of Christ, and after Piers makes his will, Hunger himself becomes the teacher, and advises Piers as to the proper manner of managing the many worthless among his laborers. Here Piers is again merely a plowman, but a man in authority over his half acre, like a head harvestman.

In the next passus, Truth sends to Piers, forbidding the proposed journey; but sends him a pardon for himself, his heirs, and his servants. This pardon is interpreted with reference to several classes of men, until finally a priest questions both pardon and interpretation, and a dispute is the consequence. Here is a new phase of the development. Piers is not made one of the clergy; but in giving him

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the power to pardon, Langland introduces the idea that pardon may come to the humblest without the mediation of any human instrumentality; and also that the humblest may serve as an acceptable minister of Truth to others, if his own life be true. Finally the lesson of this passus, which is the focal point of the entire poem, is summed up in this; that while the pope has the power of pardon, and penance and masses avail to save souls, better than all and surer than all is Dowel, a humble and godly life; and he who lives such a life has not only pardon for himself, but may secure it for others. Thus by implication, Piers Plowman becomes a minister of Christ, and another step is taken in the development of the character.

But a new conception of Piers entered the mind of the author as he proceeded to expand in Text B his first answer to the question, What is Dowel? After expressing this conception, he discovered that he had not made it consistent with that already given, and made an effort to reconcile the two in the latest revision of the poem, but without entire success. The next reference to Piers Plowman occurs at the dinner where Will, the author, in his search for Dowel, comes to table with Reason, Clergy, Conscience, and Patience (C, XVI.; B, XIII). The author is thinking of Piers as Christ, but seems to confuse in him no fewer than three different characters. He says of him that he "sette alle sciences at a soppe saue loue one" (B, XIII., 124), a remark that was made by Study (B, X., 206), though of course based on the teaching of Christ. In the same passage (B, XIII., 123), Clergy says "one Pieres the Plowman hath impugned us alle;" but (B, X., 442) it was Will, the author, that impugned Clergy, though his words were again taken from the teachings of Christ, and were in this case directly ascribed to Him. Lastly Piers and Christ are mentioned in successive sentences, as though they were intended to be separate characters (B, XIII., 132-133). Here then are confounded in a few lines, Christ, Piers Plowman, Study, and Will himself, though the author's general meaning is clear. But in view of these facts it can hardly be said that the identification of Piers Plowman with Christ is, as yet, by any means direct or complete.*

Langland next speaks of Piers Plowman as possessing the power to read men's hearts, and help them to be charitable or to love one another (B, XV., 190); yet here, while he is undoubtedly thinking of Christ as Piers Plowman, he carelessly keeps the two characters apart by referring to Christ by name in the preceding line (189). Finally he settles for us the question as to what his meaning really is,

* In B, XIII., 237, the priest bids the people pray for Piers Plowman: and in C, XVI., 195, Haukyn is Piers Plowman's prentice. These references balance; the first seems to contemplate the human side of the character, the second the divine.

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by saying in so many words, albeit in Latin, that Piers is Christ (B, XV., 206), "*Petrus, id est Christus.*" But we are not allowed to rest in this assurance; for in a short time we find them again separated, almost hopelessly. In Text B, Piers Plowman appears to Will in a vision, describes and explains to him the tree of Charity or Truelove, and states that it is to save the fruit of this tree, Piers Plowman's fruit, that Christ is commissioned. At first nothing here interferes with identification, but finally we come to the statement (B, XVI., 104) that after the birth of Christ, Piers acts as His teacher.

Langland evidently perceived the inconsistency, and attempted to remove it. In the C-text, the references to the words of Piers Plowman (C, XVI., 131)* are made somewhat more general, and less suggestive of other characters. However he makes matters rather worse instead of better by introducing into the allegory Piers' sudden and mysterious appearance at the dinner, and his equally sudden disappearance, accompanied by Reason. Here Piers utters in person the words elsewhere ascribed to Christ (C, XVI., 138) and makes use of miraculous power. From this we might conclude that Langland aimed to make unmistakable the divinity of Piers; but he again puzzles us by omitting the formal statement that Piers is Christ. But though he omits this formal statement, he removes another inconsistency, by ascribing the whole of the action of the passus (B, XVI.) to Freewill instead of Piers Plowman, including the mention of him as teacher of Christ, thus leaving us at liberty to assume for ourselves the identity of Piers and Christ, if we choose to do so.

But still another conception is presented in the twenty-first passus, making it for a time again impossible to regard Piers and Christ as one. In passus XXI. the Plowman reappears in his human character, but with new attributes, gradually growing more like Christ until the end of the poem. In the preceding passus a character is introduced which is named simply the Samaritan, but which is conceived as Christ in the flesh (not the conception just discussed), as is shown when in Passus XXI. Christ appears in person, and it is explained that he wears the armor of Piers Plowman, and resembles the Samaritan. Here reappears the idea mentioned in B, XVI.; in both texts it is stated that Jesus comes to joust with the foul fiend to redeem the fruit of Piers the Plowman. We begin now, as it would be perfectly consistent to do had no mention of Piers been made since Passus X., with two persons, Christ himself, and Piers Plowman, his humble servant or minister, whose armor Christ wears. In the armor of Piers, that is, in the body of man, the life of Christ is

*Parallel with B, XIII. See p. 252.

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described; then his apocryphal visit to hell, whence he brings the souls of many. At last (C, XXII) the author sees Piers Plowman "peynted al blody," resembling in all things our Lord, and asks the question point blank, Is this Piers Plowman, or is it Christ? Conscience answers, It is Christ with his cross, conqueror of Christendom.

Not yet, however, is it necessary to make the identification absolute; we still have Christ in the armor of Piers, and Piers is still the servant whose armor Christ wears. Piers is now more formally endowed with the functions of the clergy; he receives from Christ the power to forgive sin, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is commissioned by Grace, the Holy Spirit, as procurator, reeve, and registrar, to receive debts due. As a purveyor and plowman upon earth, with a team consisting of the four gospels, and another of the four fathers, Austin, Ambrose, Gregory, and Jerome, he receives, for sowing, the seed of the four cardinal virtues, and is ordered to build a barn to contain the harvest. The barn finished, Piers goes forth through the world with Grace, to cultivate Truth. While he does this, his friends and neighbors are attacked by the host of Anti-Christ; and the laborers flee into the barn, Holy Church, where under Conscience they attempt to defend themselves. At last the enemy through treachery obtain entrance to the barn, and secure such an advantage that Conscience girds himself to go forth and bring Piers Plowman to the rescue. Here the poem ends, and it is this last reference that seems again to make Piers Plowman one with Christ.

To the question, therefore, Who or what is Piers Plowman? no consistent answer can be given, if we attempt to reconcile all the various interpretations, or if we attempt to reconcile all three texts with each other. In one case, Professor Skeat, for instance, interprets Piers to mean the pope, bishops, the whole church, Christ, and the clergy, in almost as many consecutive lines of C, XXII. Again, we have to reconcile the author's own statement that Piers is Christ, with his equally plain teaching that Piers is a servant of Christ.

The interpretation of the character of Piers that seems to reconcile more discrepancies than any other is this: Let Piers Plowman denote man endowed with the spirit of Christ, or human nature in its highest form (Skeat, Notes, p. 250), until the end of the poem is reached, and Conscience sets out in search of him. Then and there he may be assumed to take the character of Christ, but in this place it may be regarded as a natural climax, and a fitting conclusion to the whole. If this interpretation be kept in view, it does not matter whether Piers be understood in special instances to mean pope (B,

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XIX., 424; C, XXII., 428), bishop, or plowman. It will however be necessary to reject Professor Skeat's explanation of these lines (C, XXII., 213):—

> "Tho by-gan Grace to go with Peers the Plouhman,
> And consailede hym and Conscience the comune to someny;"—

the summons being in order that the commons may be provided with means of livelihood, and of defense against Anti-Christ. Of this passage Professor Skeat says (Notes, 268), "Here Grace is the Holy Ghost, and Piers the Plowman is still Christ; the latter title not being used of Christ's deputed successors till line 258 below, though the name of *peers* has been once so used above in line 188." But there can hardly be a distinction between "peers" and Piers the Plowman, particularly as the "peers" of line 188 appears in the preceding line (187) at full length as "Peers the Plouhman." The special gifts that are afterwards mentioned proceed from the Holy Spirit, not from Piers. Moreover, at the next mention of Piers, Grace calls him "my plowman upon earth," a statement fully as consistent with his humanity as with his divinity.

That objection to the suggested interpretation, which is based on the account of Piers Plowman at the dinner (C, XVI., 138), cannot be disposed of, unless we call the passage a blunder on Langland's part. Here he certainly means Christ and as certainly calls Him Piers Plowman; but a reason for doing so, other than that suggested, is not apparent.

We have remaining, after the passages mentioned, the final reference to Piers Plowman as to one who alone can save the church. This reference does make him Divine; but for this exaltation of his character we are now fully prepared. Piers, with the exception mentioned, has been taking on more and more of the Divine character without merging in it the human, until at this point, with a single touch, he is uplifted and glorified; and he who has hitherto been a fellow laborer and a fellow sufferer as well as a guide and teacher, suddenly, yet naturally, in a moment of deepest despair, becomes a Savior. Thus a light still beams; and the darkness in which the poem ends is not absolute, nor hopeless, but may be the darkness before the dawn.

Christ the Son. I conclude then that the conventional interpretation of Piers as Christ must be accepted as the conception which was undoubtedly in the author's mind when writing a certain part of the poem; but that in revision, he weakened the conception of Piers as Divine and strengthened that of Piers as man endowed with the Divine Spirit, thus bringing into greater harmony the several parts of his poem, but not completing the unifying process. To support this

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conclusion, there is constant reference made throughout every part of the poem, to Christ in His own proper person as the Son of God, proving that to Langland Christ and Piers were ordinarily separate conceptions; and these references are as numerous or nearly so in those passages where Piers is most often mentioned, as elsewhere; "Christ" and "Piers" often standing side by side in consecutive lines.

From the references to Christ in his Divine personality may be gathered a tolerably complete life history and doctrinal teaching. In C, XIX. and XXI. are given the fullest accounts of the life of Christ, the first incomplete, the second much condensed. The first includes the incarnation, miracles, and betrayal; the second begins with Christ's last journey to Jerusalem, describes His trial and crucifixion, His descent into hell, and triumph there.

The martial and chivalric spirit of the Middle Ages appears, in that Christ rides to enter Jerusalem as a knight in armor to a tournament (C, XXI., 14). When He hangs upon the cross, none dare touch Him to wound, because He is a knight and a king's son; hence at last, the blind Longinus, himself a knight, is called on to deal the fatal blow, unwitting who his victim is. The blood streaming forth restores to Longinus his sight, whereupon he kneels to ask forgiveness of Christ, and by this act, as he is the Jews' champion, he yields to Christ, the victory, and places the Jews at His disposal, according to the law of arms.

In C, XXII. Christ appears to Thomas, and ascends into heaven, deputing His power upon earth to Piers Plowman. Further we find His commission from the Father, and His forgiveness of His slayers (C, II., 164–168), the creed of the atonement, crucifixion, and redemption (C, VIII., 121 ff.), His relation to man as father, brother, savior (Ibid., 144), the power of His love to move and direct men (C, II., 149 ff.), the necessity of belief in Him as the Son of God (C, XII., 142 ff.) His poverty (C, XIV., 1-4) and especial love for the poor (C, XII., 292), and His all-embracing mercy (C, XII., 254 ff.).

Mother of Christ. Though the central figure in Langland's theology is Christ himself, he recognizes in accordance with the teaching of the church, the dignity and authority of His mother. She is frequently invoked by name (C, III., 2), or as intercessor with the Son (C, VII., 170). It is stated in Latin and again in English (C, VIII., 250–289) that she, under the name of Mercy, has a key to heaven, that both she and her Son may grant help to the sinful, and that there is no other help but through those two.

Heaven. The poem contains no picture of heaven, but only occasional references and suggestions. It is variously located, sometimes toward the east, from the point of view of the stage of the Miracle

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Plays, and sometimes toward the south, from the traditional point of view. As to constitution and government (C, II., 104 ff.), there are among the angels ten orders of knighthood, and we may conclude that the multitude of the redeemed are the commons, and that among them there are degrees of bliss, for the thief who repented upon the cross (C, XV., 132) is not seated with the saints and martyrs, but upon a far lower level.

Purgatory. Langland believes with the church that souls repentant, but who have not made full restitution (C, XIII., 65: see topic Penance) may be purified in purgatory, and that the prayers of the good, masses, and special services avail to lighten their punishment. To sing at such services was his own employment (C, VI., 46). Good deeds enable kings and knights to pass purgatory easily (C, X., 9). Those who take bribes shall yield them again at one year's end, in a full perilous place called purgatory (B, VI., 42). The patient poor pass purgatory sooner than the rich (C, XIV., 31), and through perfect faith, one may pass purgatory penanceless (C, XII., 296).

The Evil Spirit. As was the contemporary belief (Skeat, Notes, 258), to Langland Lucifer is the chief of the fallen angels, the Prince of Hell, while Satan, the Duke of Death, is merely a subordinate under Lucifer. Chaucer (Monks Tale, line 14) applies the name Sathanas to Lucifer after his fall. In the passage where Langland introduces both (C, XXI., 262 ff.) Professor Skeat points out that there is some confusion in their traditional characters, since to Lucifer and not to Satan is ascribed the temptation of Eve (C, XXI., 315). But the characters are clearly differentiated. Satan counsels armed resistance to the approach of Christ; Lucifer knows this to be vain, but in his turn would meet Him with a legal plea, which Satan perceives to be useless. Subsequently Lucifer's subordinates accuse him of having lost to them their joy in heaven, and now through his deception of Eve the lordship of hell is also to be forfeited. For this deception Lucifer is bound, while the rest flee and hide.

Lucifer was formerly a member of the chief order of knighthood in heaven (C, II., 105). Believing that he was wittier and worthier than his Master (C, VI., 188), he sought to establish a kingdom for himself in the north part of heaven (C, II., 112) but on his way thither he failed and fell, and all his fellows; some in earth, some in air, some in hell deep — Lucifer lowest of them all, though still retaining his leadership.

Why Lucifer sought the north is a question Langland declines to answer, that he may spare the feelings of northern men (C, II., 105). We might take the statement (Ibid. 134) that active men need no

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fire except on a holiday, as a hint that Lucifer's idea was to establish a kingdom in a country where the climate would compel his followers to be active and agressive, and hence would insure stability of government. But Professor Skeat states that the conventional explanation (Piers Plowman, E. E. T. S. ed., Vol. IV., Section I., p. 35) is that Lucifer's malice in causing other angels to fall from heaven was like the coldness of the north winds that chill the flowers, and hence that the north was the only suitable place for him.

The devil, the same who deceived our first parents, and hence for consistency, Lucifer, though by tradition he should be called Satan, lies in wait for the fruit of the tree of charity, that is for the souls of men at death, and is continually endeavoring to batter them down from the tree. To him all robbers are especially near of kin (C, VII., 330, and parallel passages).

Hell. We have a more complete picture of the infernal regions than of heaven (C, XXI) but still lacking in definiteness. Its location is more confused than that of heaven; it is toward the north in the passage just mentioned, toward the west (C, I., 16; C, II., 55), and toward the east (C, XXI., 19). The first comes from tradition, the second is the position opposed to that of heaven upon the Mystery stage, and the third is probably due (Skeat, Notes, 253) to the position of the mouth of hell upon a separate stage of the same platform.

There are degrees in hell as in heaven. Trajan, because his life was moral, was punished not deep in hell, but so high up that he was delivered thence, and is now in the lowest heaven (C, XV., 150; cf. C, XIII., 75). With respect to the matter of deliverance from hell there is a difference of opinion between Truth and Mercy (C, XXI. 115-157 ff.). Those condemned under the Mosaic law may be delivered through the atonement of Christ, and the example of Trajan proves, in at least one instance, the power of prayer to deliver; but it is not certain that this establishes a rule, since the fate of Solomon, Socrates, and Aristotle is still in doubt (C, XII., 220; C, XV., 192).

b. MAN. DUTIES AND TRANSGRESSIONS.

Place in Creation. The earth is for the habitation of man, and the elements and all creatures are for his service and delight (C, II., 17; B, XI., 389). Man is responsible for a double portion of wit and freewill (B, VIII., 55-56), yet often rules himself less according to Reason's teaching than do the other animals (C, XIV., 192). Men may be classified into three degrees of holiness, the married, the widowed, and the virgin (C, XIX., 71 ff.). He must not seek after knowledge beyond his natural portion (C, XIV., 222 ff.).

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General Duties. If the teaching of the whole poem may be reduced to a word, man's duty is to love and labor. The duty of love and benevolence is constantly iterated, and its application is made specific in countless instances; while the duty of labor is the keynote struck in the beginning, and with all the author's power. Labor should be honest, and love should be according to law. For the rest, we may sum up Langland's teaching as that man's duty comprises the observance of the four cardinal virtues, and the avoidance of the seven deadly sins through the cultivation of their opposites (See C, XXII., 274; also C, VI. and VII). Langland places especial stress upon temperance, economy, humility, honesty, and truth.

Active and Contemplative Life. Attendance upon divine service upon Sunday is obligatory upon all (C, X., 221-245). Langland believes in all the observances of the church, but good works towards one's fellowmen, and faith, are of even greater value (C, II., 170-181; C, XII., 142-148). And one observance of the church, that of receiving windows commemorating the giver, he disapproves in toto, and gives warning that good deeds are not to be published (C, IV., 63-76). There are two kinds of life that are acceptable to Christ, the active and the contemplative; and both are blessed if lived in accordance with the law of God (B, VI., 249 ff.). To the contemplative life belong prayer and the observances of the church, but it must be lived in self-sacrifice, not self-seeking (C, II., 170-181); one may know Christ neither through words nor works, but through will alone (B, XV., 204). The active life may also be abused, as it is by Haukyn (C, XVI., 194 ff.), who finds the task of providing for his temporal wants so great that he lacks time to care properly for his own spiritual life; but if lived in faith, love, temperance, and humility, it is worthy and sure of heaven (B, XIV., 46-58). In another sense, the married life is active life, and widowhood and virginity are two degrees of the contemplative life (C, XIX., 71-83). The latter is perhaps the holier, if worthily lived.

The Poor. Langland, though he realizes the sins and short-comings of the poor, provides them with all the consolation in his power, the conclusions of his philosophy of life. Since they suffer so much in this life, they shall surely be rewarded in the life to come, if they are patient under suffering (C, XIII., 194). Thus the equipoise will be restored; having winter here, they will have summer in heaven (A, XIV., 160), and may claim heaven as it were by right (C, XVII., 57, 103). The blessings of poverty in this life are also fully discussed (C, XIII., XIV., and XVII.; and B, XI). The poor are not in danger of enemies as are the rich; the sins of pride, gluttony, and

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so on, can obtain no advantage from poverty; adversity teaches one to look to God for help (C, XVII., 95); to forsake possessions is to become kin to Christ. Poverty (C, XVII) is hateful to pride, has not to sit as judge, and is thus freed from care, is not troubled with evil winnings or appeals to lend, is temperate and defends the flesh from sins, gives health and strength, lives in peace, is wise, truthful, not covetous, a true laborer, does not overcharge, is the comfort and solace of the soul. Such is Langland's interpretation of a passage from Vincent of Beauvais.

The Rich. As obverse of this picture, we have the rich, doomed to suffer in the next world for their joy in this, unless they have recourse to confession, contrition, and satisfaction. The rich are wasteful (C, I., 24), often dishonest, and, in that case, should not be entitled to the freedom of any city (C, IV., 112). They keep at their tables idle and worthless minstrels and jesters, to the neglect of the worthy poor (C, X., 128); and indulge there in idle disputation and infidel conversation (C, XII., 35). They are loved only for what they possess, and their giving is less pleasing to God than is the patient endurance of the poor (C, XVI., 282). They must beware lest they be condemned as Dives was, for sins of omission (C, XX., 228).

King. As already noted (page 244), the political duties of the king are founded upon the moral law. He must be generous (C, IV., 266), love the commons, his treasure (C, IV., 181), defend holy church (C, X., 12), and rule according to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (C, XI., 100), being accountable to Dobest. The meaning of the famous prophecy (B, X., 317-330; C, VI., 169-180), is doubtless that through a king, by virtue of his royal power, is the sole hope of reform in the church.

Knights. The true knight owes his faithful tenant kindness and fair speech, should take no bribe, be courteous, be no hearer of tales (C, IX., 19-53), dispute not conscience, or the rights of holy church (Cf. page 244).

Pope. There are many traces of an independent and critical attitude toward the head of the church, especially since there were in Langland's time two claimants of the position; and this independence of attitude seems to increase in later versions of the poem. Though in Text A (VIII., 8) he has spoken of the pope's pardoning power, in the parallel passage he transfers this power to Truth. But this power is again ascribed to the pope (C, X., 324) and the pope is undoubtedly meant (C, XXII., 188 ff.) where Piers Plowman is said to have the power to bind and unbind, and assoil of all sins save the failure to make restitution.

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Haukyn complains (C, XVI., 217 ff.) that for his support of the pope, he has received nothing in return (Cf. B-text), and wishes that the pope might subdue the pestilence, not daring to impute his failure to a lack of power or holiness in the pope himself, but ascribing it to the sinfulness of men upon whom the pestilence is sent. The schism of the popes probably gives rise to several allusions. No wit or strength of this world can make a peace between the pope and his enemies profitable to both (C, XVI., 173). It is wrong for the pope to pay men to make war upon other Christians, and the ways of peace are preferable for the good of the church, and of Christ's kingdom (C, XVIII., 234). Imperfect is the pope that all people should help, and sendeth them that slay such as he shouid save (C, XXII., 430).

Cardinals. As the most virtuous virtues are the cardinal virtues, cardinals should be most virtuous of men, and doubtless are so (C, I., 134). But a certain ignorant vicar, who has already impeached the pope, doubts this (C, XXII., 411-425), and looks upon cardinals rather as sources of all evil. Coming from Rome to bring messages and collect moneys, they are sources of great expense, lechers, and a curse to the country they come into.

Bishops. The principal charge, among many, against bishops, is that they seek sloth and ease, neglecting the care of souls, and are particularly careless of the command of Christ to preach the gospel to all nations; hence so-called bishops of foreign lands maintain residence in London or Rome, and never think of going elsewhere (C. XVIII., 187). They should be learned, wise, and holy; fearless in reproving sin, living as they teach. They are the rulers and judges in the church, and with the apostles may act as judges at domesday (C, X., 13–21). Their punishment will be according to their responsibility if they fail (Ibid., 255). But poisoned by the gift of lands as the church is, its bishops seek only for lands and money (C, XVIII., 220); often they purchase their positions (C, VI., 70), are ignorant of their duties, and allow their subordinates to deceive the people with false teaching, false miracles, and the sale of relics, images, and indulgences (C, I., 66–100).

Parochial Clergy. Upon the parochial clergy and friars, Langland expends all his energy and indignation. As with the bishops, the root of all is neglect of duty and eagerness for money. They leave their charges to seek silver in London, allow traveling pardoners to preach to their people, and divide with them the profits of the sale of indulgences or pardons. Often they are unchaste, proud, slothful, and ignorant. When pure, they often lack charity. As a complete antithesis to Chaucer's parson, nothing better could be

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found than the character of Sloth (C, VIII., 1-67; cf. B. X., 306-309). They quarrel constantly with the friars over the profits of confession (C, VII., 119–129), and live as wolves among their own sheep (C, XVII., 241–278).

Priests who dwell in cities should be attached to some church (C, VI., 89). They should desire poverty as the more blessed condition, and, apparently, Wyclif's "poor priests" are commended (C, XIV., 101) while the spirit of the new movement is further approved in that Langland commends translatio n of the Bible (C, XI., 88). Priests should be created for their learning, and should be free born. But learning without the Spirit of God is emptiness; such clergy are easily turned from the faith; while the ignorant are always blind leaders of the blind. They may be lost, as were the builders of the ark (C, XII., 250), having their reward in this world, and forfeiting it in the next (A, III., 237). A priest must suffer all things, and pass by riches, wine, and women (C, XII., 103–118). Passus XVIII. gives one of the strongest pictures of what a perfect priest should be, in contrast with the depth of infamy to which many have fallen.

Priests may take no tithes of evil men, else they shall be punished in purgatory (C, VII., 300). They must be faithful to the minutest details of duty, and even "overskipping" in reading the services is a fault so serious as to be twice condemned (C, XIV., 119; XVIII., 118). Langland utters a point-blank denial of the general assumption of priests and monks that to them is due the first and best of everything (C, XVIII., 58–63):—

> Help thy father first before friars and monks,
> And before priests and pardoners, or any people else.
> Help thy kin Christ bade, for there beginneth charity,
> And afterward await who hast most need,
> And there help if thou hast, and that hold I charity.

Clergy as Scholarship. Clergy means scholarship as well as priesthood. The advantages of Clergy are pictured in Passus XV. It has skill to confound its adversaries, makes record of the truth, teaches, and leads to salvation. Untaught men have a learning of their own, but it saves not souls; it is but knowledge of birds and beasts, and is folly without the Divine Spirit (C, XV., 72). Even a single line of Holy Writ in the memory has power to save a thief from the gallows (C, XV., 129). The clerk may protect himself and others; if he err, he destroys all faith of those about him, but if he does well, his followers do better (C, XVIII., 122).

Friars. The four orders of friars of which Langland usually speaks were the Eremite or Austin friars, or Augustines; the Carmelites, or white friars; the Dominicans, or Jacobins, or black, or preaching friars; and the Franciscans, Minorites, or grey friars. The fifth

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order, mentioned in the C-text, was probably that of the Trinity friars. crutched friars, or crossbearers (Cyc. Brit., IX., article Friars; Skeat, Notes, 9). For a description of the friar at his best, we should turn to the description of Charity (C, XVII., 297 ff.), though that description includes more than the friars alone. Charity rejoices with the glad and mourns with the sorrowing, fears no sickness or hardship, has no property and cares for none, goes on pilgrimages to the poor and those who are in prison, yet is merry at meat, and very good company. But finally we are told that he was found but once in a friar's frock, and that many years ago, in St. Francis' time.

For love of money friars too forsake their rules, trespass upon the parishes of the clergy to confess those afraid to confess to the priest who knows them best (C, XXIII., 286; C, IV., 38). They quarrel with the secular clergy, and among themselves; glose the gospel to suit themselves (C, I., 58) and for money pervert the teachings of better men (C, VII., 118), thus weakening the faith of man (C, XII., 54–60). For money they pardon the gravest sins, and prefer always to administer those offices of the church to which a fee is attached (C, IV., 38, B, XI., 65). They admit rich men to the privileges and benefits of their order by means of letters of fraternity, without requiring of them any self-denial or vows, or aught else except liberal payments (C, XIII., 4–11; Skeat, Notes, 130). They are entitled to help and support only when they ask humbly and for what they need (C, IX., 146). But instead of asking humbly, they claim the best seats and the best food, vaunt their own holiness (C, XI., 18), and preach best when full of wine, even on the subject of temperance, and at the same time exalt the virtue of doing as one preaches (C, XVI., 65–127). They love to deal with idle matters, and those above the comprehension of the people (C, XVII., 230).

To sum up (see C, XIII., 230 ff.), they are welcome in holy church so long as they live after their rule and the example of the founders of the orders, and keep their numbers within reasonable limits. But their undue increase in number, their false philosophy, their shriving of the guilty without due penance and restitution, will lead to the destruction of themselves if not of the church; and the Flatterer who poisons the defenders of the church, and drives Conscience forth into the world to seek the aid of Piers Plowman, is a friar.

Hermits. Hermits no longer live like the early anchorites (C, XVIII., 13–36) but have their cells in public places, and wander abroad like friars and recreant priests (C, I., 51). Even more against them than the friars is the charge laid that they have chosen a life nominally religious to avoid labor (C, X., 188–254). In the life of

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Pilgrims and Palmers. the pilgrims and palmers there seems to be nothing even nominally religious, except the pilgrimage itself, which Langland is disinclined to accept as a religious observance. Their leave to lie (C, I., 48) if not granted by the Pope, existed by common consent; and in another sense, a palmer, notwithstanding all his journeying, had not the remotest conception of the way to Truth.

Nuns. There is quarreling and unchastity even in the nunneries; a statement with which Gower is in accord (Morley, E. W., IV., 187). Langland approves the ordinance of Gregory that women shall not be admitted to the priesthood (B, V., 166; C, VII., 132–150).

Lollers. Partly in the church and partly out of it belongs the class of idle vagabonds, *lollers*, of whom are many hermits and pilgrims, besides many who think neither of hermitage nor pilgrimage. Langland resembled these, although they thought little of him (C, VI., 1–4). The growing tendency to apply the term to those who held and practiced new doctrines, or peculiar theories of life, is apparent in the poem; but the formal definition of it as given by Langland is as follows: (C, X., 215)

> "He that lolleth is lame, other his leg out of ioynte,
> Other meymed in som membre, for to meschief hit souneth (hinteth)."

But he himself applies it to a certain class lame only in a metaphorical sense,—

> "And ryght so sothlyche such manere eremytes
> Lollen a3en the byleyve and lawe of holy churche;"

showing that there was a general appreciation of the similarity between the idle beggars of the church; and the idle beggars who lay by the wayside, and feigned themselves wounded, crippled, or diseased.

Merchants. The especial charge against the merchants is, of course, that of deceitful dealing (confession of Avarice, C, VII.. 196 ff.); but the dignity of their occupation is recognized, and they are bidden to buy and sell, and use their winnings in specified works of charity (C, X., 22 ff.; see also C, III., 222; C, IV., 112). The dangers and uncertainties of their business are also hinted at (C, VII., 278; C, IV., 33).

Lawyers. Lawyers, the term including political officials of all sorts, are particular friends of Lady Meed, and there is not one from the highest to the lowest who does not woo her. These are liars, lechers, brokers of evil, malicious prosecutors, extortioners, shielders of the guilty; they allow prisoners to escape either by opening doors, or by buying off the prosecutor, at the same time appealing to his sympathy, as was done in the case of Wrong (C, V., 45–65). Thus did many a bright noble baldly bear adown the wit and wisdom of West-

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minster Hall (C, XXIII., 132); and it also appears that bright nobles could make "leal matrimony depart ere death come," and shape divorces (Ibid., 139).

The fullest enumeration of the evil deeds of judges and counselors is found in Richard the Redeless (III., 317–345), but probably has reference to the special abuses of a particular time. They foment quarrels, prolong cases, bring false charges, give judgment before giving evidence, and endanger the lives of those who complain. Magistrates share in the general corruption under Meed (C, IV., 109).

As toward the king, magistrates should judge justly, and as toward the people should impose fines and punishments in love and kindness (C, II., 157). All counselors should seek Truth, not gold or gifts B, V., 53); and should give advice free to those who cannot afford to pay (C, X., 44–57; B, VII., 39–58).

c. DOCTRINES OF HOLY CHURCH.

The Church. The source of the church is the Trinity. She is a lovely lady descended from the castle of Truth (C, II., 4). In one passage she calls herself the daughter of Christ and duchess of heaven (C, III., 31); while in another is conveyed the more conventional idea that the church is the bride of Christ. More interesting than these is the account of the church as the barn of Piers Plowman, which becomes the church militant when assailed by Anti-Christ, where Conscience is commander, and Peace gate-keeper. Meed is the bitter enemy of the church. The church has been poisoned by the endowment of lands (C, XVIII., 220). From foes without, and unworthy servants within, she has come to low estate, and needs to be clothed new (C, VI., 180), but this is misfortune, not fault. Her law is charity (C, XVIII., 124), belief, loyalty; and she is a refuge for all men, except the evil who have not forsaken their wickedness (C, XI., 76). She is the custodian of the bodies of men after death (C, IX., 100); the guardian of the sick and helpless (C, IX., 138), of those that lack full understanding, of fatherless children, poor widows and helpless maids (B, IX., 66). Sponsors in the church must see that their godchildren walk uprightly (B, IX., 74).

Sin. The chief auxiliaries of Anti-Christ in this world are the seven deadly sins, of whom, if any distinction may be made, Langland seems to regard Pride, Avarice and Gluttony as chief; judging from the fullness of his descriptions (C, VII. and VIII.). Gower's treatment of this subject (Confessio Amantis) is more complete and formal than Langland's. His list includes all the subordinates, as follows:

1. Pride; hypocrisy, disobedience, presumption, boasting, vain glory. 2. Envy; grudging of good fortune, gladness at grief, de-

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traction, dissimulation, supplantation. 3. Wrath; melancholy, chiding, hate, contest, homicide. 4. Sloth; delay, pusillanimity, forgetfulness, negligence, idleness, somnolence, despair. 5. Avarice; jealousy, cupidity, perjury, usury, parsimony, ingratitude, violent seizure, robbery, secret theft, sacrilege. 6, Gluttony; drunkenness, delicacy. 7. Lust.

Langland's order is: pride, envy, anger, lechery, avarice, gluttony, sloth; and his treatment has life as well as simplicity. Each sin is represented by a single penitent, with the exception of Pride, which has two exponents, and the personal appearance of each is as fully portrayed as are the various forms of misconduct in each. If the confession of each be followed through in detail, it will be found that Langland has in mind probably an exposition similar to that of Gower, but is treating it with his usual freedom.

The picture of Glutton is most lifelike of all. That of Sloth is only less so; he is a fat and greasy country priest, ignorant, careless of duty and offices, riding to hunt, denying debts, and cheating his servants. Through Sloth we may trace a way to the unpardonable sin. Sloth leads to despair, and the branches that lead men to sloth and despair are (C, VIII., 70), lack of sorrow for sin, neglect of penance and almsdeeds, living against belief and law, neglect to study; all of these cause man to doubt the grace of God, and hence prevent him from repenting and calling for mercy. Yet all sin may be forgiven if there be contrition (C, XIII., 71); and sorrow of heart is satisfaction for such as may not pay otherwise (C, XX., 296), though restitution and good works should be added if possible. The unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, has many forms, but the chief is to slay an innocent man, a follower of Christ (C, XX., 260-296). Even this slayer might be pardoned did he not despair of obtaining mercy and hence fail to repent. Hence Sloth, which leads to despair and disbelief in the power of God, is one of the most dangerous of the deadly sins,

Salvation. How then may I save my soul, asks Will (C, II., 80). Holy Church answers, Live in truth and love, be true of tongue and hands, do good works therewith, and do no man ill. If one's intent and effort be true, there is pardon for failure (C, IV., 350). To remove the stain of actual sin are repentance, penance, and faith (C, IV., 401). These place men in a right relation to God.

Salvation is of grace, not works (C, XII., 254-271), and grace may be withdrawn (C, VIII,, 283 ff.); yet there is merit in good works if they be inspired by love and a sincere devotion to the idea of right, as is taught by the story of Trajan. Faith without works is inefficient and may fail to save (C, XIII., 92 ff.). And faith and good works

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do not save without the Atonement of Christ (C, VIII,, 121; C, XX., 81); those who died under the Mosaic dispensation awaited in hell the coming of Christ as their deliverer.

The prayers of the righteous for those still upon earth (C, IV., 98) avail to save souls from purgatory, and in the case of Trajan the prayers of a most holy man delivered him from hell itself, a result due to his just life as well as to prayer. But Solomon, Socrates and Aristotle are supposed to be still in hell (C, XII., 220). However Langland expresses some doubt of the traditional belief, and reasons that since a just man shall *hardly* be saved in the day of judgment, it therefore follows that he may be saved. A true man that lives as his law teaches, and believes that there be no better, or would have kept it if there were, and lives and dies in that will, for him there certainly is commendation, his faith is great, and hope of reward depends upon that faith (B, XII., 268-293; C, XV., 192-217).

One may sin often and yet be saved, as one in a boat may fall within it and be in no danger (C, XI., 30). The salvation of the ignorant may be more easily accomplished than that of the learned; but those who are saved late or narrowly may not expect a high place in heaven (C, XV., 92-145).

Christ may not be renounced after full acceptance, but neglect of duty to Him will be punished in purgatory until all arrearages are made up (C, XIII., 53-70).

Baptism. To be baptized is the command of Christ (B, XIV., 183), and children are not saved without it (B, XI., 82). It washes away all sin, and is the pledge of salvation (B, XIV., 181-190). There is a baptism of font, of blood, and of fire (C, XV., 207). It should be administered by a Christian only, except among the heathen, Saracens and Jews at the approach of death, when an unbeliever may perform the rite. In such a case belief and baptism are sufficient to save; but ordinarily to belief and baptism must be added fulfillment of law (B, XIV., 345-359).

Confession, Penance, Absolution. If a man sin after baptism, the three steps toward forgiveness are contrition, confession, and satisfaction (C, XVII., 25). Contrition makes deadly sin venial, and contrition and faith may save even without confession. Confession slays the sin; and satisfaction, which may be interpreted penance or restitution, buries it out of sight and makes it like a wound healed (B, XIV., 82-96). It is implied (B, XI., 94) that the secrets of the confessional are to be preserved.

Though Langland formally teaches the duty of penance, he really attaches to it little importance; in fact he satirizes it by making his penitents propose their own penances, and these often apparent

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rather than real. Pride will wear a hair shirt, Lechery drink with the duck only, Glutton will eat no fish on Friday, not stating whether he means to abstain from food altogether or substitute roast beef, Sloth will be at church before day every Sunday for seven years, a robber will polish his pikestaff and make pilgrimages. Repentance, the confessor, pays little attention to these propositions; but insists upon restitution, particularly in the case of Avarice; and after that, prayer. If one may not restore his illgotten goods to the owner, he may bear them to the bishop; perhaps another touch of satire. The only pilgrimages that Langland approves are those to visit the sick and unfortunate (C, XVII., 32; C, V., 122); confessors should enjoin for penance, peace, forgiveness, and love, and those that make pilgrimages to Rome should rather seek Truth (C, VI., 195). Yet, after stating that without contrition, confession and satisfaction, prayer, penance, pilgrimage, and writing in windows are all in vain, he admits that with these three essentials, telling of beads, pilgrimages, privy penances and almsgiving are as aids to holiness C, XXII., 377; C, XVII., 29).

Shrift cares for the wounded of Holy Church (C, XXIII., 306). Pardon is sure for those that truly repent and believe and amend, even without human intervention. Power to forgive sins is deputed to Piers Plowman (C, X., 8; C, XXII., 185); yet Piers tears up his pardon and prefers to put his trust in prayer, penance (or restitution), and right living; while the pardon itself proves to be simply the promise that the righteous shall inherit eternal life (B, VII., 111 ff.). True laborers shall have pardon (C, X., 60-68). Patient endurance of poverty, sickness and suffering in this life will be accepted as expiation, at least in part (C, X., 175). In short, while the pope has power to absolve from sin and purgatory without penance, and though contrition and confession should be life long (C, XI., 53), and prayer and penance have power to save, nothing is so sure toward this end as Dowel—right living (C, X., 318 to end).

Dowel, Dobet, Dobest.

The key to heaven is therefore not to be found in formal observances of any kind,—

> Be unkind to thy fellow-Christian, and all that thou canst pray,
> Deal, and do penance day and night ever,
> And purchase all the pardon of Pampeluna and of Rome,
> And indulgences enough, and be ingrate to thy kind,
> The Holy Ghost heareth thee not, nor helpeth thee, be thou certain (C, XX., 216-220);—

but it is found only in Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest; and having thus suggested the question, What are these? it is not strange that Langland devoted the major part of his poem, if not of his life, to answering it.

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Without multiplying references, the general conclusion is that Dowel is to purify one's own life and action; Dobet is to care for the needs of others; Dobest is to act with authority, teaching, leading men toward the right, warning the doers of evil, and evidently involves something of clergy (learning). Hence, while to engage in priestly offices is Dowel and possibly Dobet, it is by no means necessarily Dobest. To apply this to Langland himself, in singing the seven psalms for the souls of the departed he was in accord with Dobet; but in writing the Vision of Piers Plowman he was most assuredly with Dobest. Thus did he carry the gospel among men; a gospel new in its application if not in its underlying principles. Without rejecting or questioning the doctrines of his church, he interpreted them in the light of a "clene conscience," and thus restored them often to their original simplicity and opened the way to the Reformation.

Our Neighbor. Passus X, of the poem may be called the doctrinal passus. One of the most moving and eloquent passages is that defining "our neighebores" (C, X., 71-138) as "the most needy."

Marriage. Marriage between the humble should be undertaken at the will of parents, and the counsel of friends, and then by assent of the parties concerned (B, IX., 112). It is unprofitable without offspring (C, XIX., 222). The law of heredity imposes on every one the greatest care in choosing a mate (C, XI., 233 ff.). There is a time for marriage, and those conceived out of time become false folk and faithless, thieves and liars as was Cain (A, X., 127; C, XI., 202 ff.). Good should wed good, though they no goods have, and those who marry for goods shall lead lives unlovely. Maidens should marry maidens, widowers widows, and every manner secular man may wed; a statement which Professor Skeat construes to include the secular clergy (Notes, 145). We have noted that hasty marriages abounded after the pestilence, and that divorces were not unknown (page 265).

Unbelief. Idle scholastic discussion of matters connected with Scripture (C, XII., 35 ff.) and careless preaching have brought a lack of faith in Holy Writ. Scripture should not be shown to those who love to raise idle questions, and preaching to those whose hearts are not ready to receive is useless. If it were not possible to dispute any of the teachings of Holy Church, if the truth of all were absolutely certain, one means of grace would be lost to man; there would no longer be any faith if faith were certainty (C, XII., 159).

Predestination. If all that Scripture and Clergy teach be true, salvation will be impossible for many (C, XII., 201-223); for they say that man's name is written in the book of life, or else not written,

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long before he is born. Perhaps for this reason, Solomon and Aristotle are lost; if they wrought well, and are now in pain, it would be unwise for us to imitate them. Again Scripture teaches (C, XIII., 40-60) that many were summoned to the feast, and only a few admitted. Will thereupon wonders whether he is chosen or not chosen, though he reflects that Holy Church had received him at the font for one of God's chosen. He concludes finally that Christ's invitation is for all who will; that all the world may claim and receive mercy through His blood and through baptism. No wicked man shall be lost but if he will (C, XV.,135); one thief upon the cross accepted Him; and if it be asked why the other did not, no clerk can tell.

Charity. The formal definition of Charity (C, XVII., 297 ff.) was referred to in describing the good friar (page 263). Again (C, XIX) Freewill defines charity as the fruit of the tree of True Love, though before the discussion is well begun charity becomes the tree itself, and man the fruit. It is supported on three props representing the three persons of the Trinity; its blossoms are Kind Speech, its root Mercy, its stem Ruth or Pity, and its leaves the words of the law of Holy Church (Skeat, Notes, 235). Charity, represented by the Samaritan (C, XX., 46) and typifying Christ, saved the wounded man when Faith and Hope had passed by him.

Cardinal Virtues. The four cardinal virtues are prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice (C, XXII., 274). At the beginning of Passus XXIII. it is said that Necessity, or Need, is superior to all the virtues except temperance; and that in need one may not take counsel of Conscience. One may take meat to save life, when none will give, and the same is true of cloth and drink. Then follows a statement of the deficiencies of some of the virtues. Fortitude is apt to go too far or not far enough; justice has to be guided by the law, and prudence may make mistakes. Then we are told of the virtue of Need. It makes men humble, was chosen by philosophers and by Christ, and will at last turn to joy; so shall one not be ashamed to beg and to be in want. The purpose of this remarkable passage may be to show the weakness of the excuses that have been put forth in the preceding passus by those who fail to observe the cardinal virtues, and to show what is the only valid excuse for a departure from what is commonly reckoned virtue.

Communion. The Holy Communion may be received worthily only after restitution, implying the preceding steps, contrition and confession. As to the Real Presence therein, God's body might not be of bread without clergy (B, XII., 87). One is never right strong until he has eaten the body of Christ, and drunk His blood (C, XX., 87). The blessed bread conceals the body of God (C, XXII., 387). This

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language might have been used by Wyclif, but there is no question as to Langland's simple acceptance of the church's teaching.

4. LANGLAND'S PHILOSOPHY.

Langland's work was intended to have a moral significance only. The efforts of the scholastics had been directed chiefly towards reducing the vast mass of theological doctrine and dogma to something like system. We do not find that Langland is especially systematic; but we do find some traces of scholastic methods, as well as of scholastic conclusions. We might in fact say that the whole of the theological and religious teaching of which an exposition has been given is scholastic, so far as it is systematic and reasoned out in all its parts. But what was scholastic in this respect was common property, and not distinctive of Langland; in fact, in his lack of system and in his belief that it is not possible to give reasons for all one's beliefs, he was decidedly unscholastic. He advances many doctrines theological and doctrines religious, but as to their bearing upon each other he cares little. The curious questions and conceits with which the mediaeval scholastics used to amuse themselves would certainly have been condemned by him (Page 269; C, XII., 35 ff.). But to tell how two persons of the Trinity slew the third is irreverent rather than scholastic; and Langland himself asks many of the questions which used to engage their attention. Of such a nature perhaps are the questions, Why did Lucifer attempt to establish a kingdom in the north (C, II., 112)? Why was the Fall permitted (B, X., 105)? Why should men now suffer for the transgression of Adam (B, X., 111)? If Scripture be true, how can any rich man reach heaven (C, XII., 200)? Why did one thief upon the cross repent and not the other (C, XV., 154)? Are Solomon, Socrates, and Aristotle saved (C, XV., 193)? Are there not also traces of scholasticism, perhaps of sophistry, in the doctor's argument (C, XVI., 172) with Patience; in the discussion between Lucifer, Satan, Goblin, and Christ (C, XXI., 272); and in the argument of Need (C, XXII., 150)? In the latter case Langland seems to adopt as his own the reasoning which he uses; in the other case his attitude is shown by his placing the argument in the mouths of those whom he has already satirized, and by the formal remonstrance which he makes against empty discussions (C, XII., 35). This important passage is made more significant by the fact that the remonstrance is made by Study, and is aimed at her husband, Wit, who has nothing to say in self-defence. Hence we may conclude that exercising speculation without the direction of some safe guide, the Bible or the Fathers, is an indefensible thing.

Scholasticism.

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Wit must be directed by Study; Study must be occupied in a proper manner; questions that may not be answered must be passed by; and answers that may not be understood must be accepted on authority, by faith.

Langland's mental habit. Langland thinks too much and too widely not to touch sometimes upon the questions of the physical and mental life of man. For instance, he wonders why man, with his double portion of intelligence, is so prone to make mistakes; while other animals with their lesser portion, always act rightly with reference to their own interests (C, XIV., 143). Yet, recognizing the difference in phenomena he did not for a moment conceive a distinction between instinct and reason, but immediately gave up the whole question, fearing that he was treading upon forbidden ground. But this speculative passage, though it ends in a stinging self-rebuke, shows that his mind is of too high an order to follow a beaten path without thinking what lay beyond it, and deepens our respect for his mental power.

Langland's inveterate habit of personification sometimes leads to apparent confusion as to the meaning of terms; but in general his distinctions are clear when his conceptions can be disentangled from their personal embodiment. The moral significance of his terms is to be taken into account along with their mental and physical meaning, as this moral meaning was to him their chief one.

The Mental Faculties. It seems probable that Langland's own ideas of the meaning of the various names for the mental faculties were derived from the passage translated, not altogether accurately, in Passus XVII., (B, XV., 23; C, XVII., 182). The character called Anima in B, Freewill in C, is defined according to its various functions as Anima (the vital principle) when it quickens the body; Animus (the reasoning principle or rational soul) when it will or would; Mens (the power of thought, the mind) when it understands or knows; Memoria, when it recalls what has taken place ("makes moan to God"); Ratio, when it judges; Sensus, when it feels and perceives ("and that is wit and wisdom, the well of all crafts"); Conscientia, when it challenges (claims or excuses) or challenges not, bargains for or refuses (accepts or refuses); Amor, when it loves; Liberum arbitrium, when it will do or not do good deeds or ill (Lat.: turns from evil to the good); and Spiritus, when it flees from the body and leaves it lifeless. In the B-text all these terms except Free Will are given as names for Anima; but in the C-text they are given as names for Free Will, which is inserted and made to assume undue importance. The B-text is most consistent with the Latin original (Skeat, Notes, 215; C, XVII., 201), and with

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the present accepted interpretation of the terms used. To say that this is a list of the specific functions or faculties of the soul is comprehensible; to say that the soul is a faculty of the will, and that the will is a faculty of itself, is to us nonsense.

Anima, or Life. In this passage we should have a guide to the philosophical interpretation of several important characters. Anima is mentioned elsewhere (C, XI., 127 ff.) as dwelling in a castle made of the four elements, earth, air, wind and water; she is dear to Kynde (interpreted as Nature, God) and is like Him. For safety she is placed in this castle whose lord is Dowel; his daughter Dobet is her servant; above both, peer of a bishop, is Dobest, her teacher, Inwit (Conscience) is constable of that castle; and with him are the other wits, his five sons, Seewell, Saywell, Hearwell, Workwell, and Goodfaith Gowell;—not exactly the five senses, but a conception of Langland's own of the agencies most likely to repel Satan.

The list of mental faculties given above is taken from Isidore (Skeat, Notes, 215). Following another source of popular philosophy, Langland says that Inwit is in the head and Anima in the heart. This statement is derived from Galen (Skeat, Notes, 140), who divides the functions into the vital, essential to life, whose seat is the heart; animal, perceived and subject to the will, whose seat is the head; natural, not perceived, whose seat is the liver. We are somewhat at a loss to determine whether Langland regards Anima as the vital function simply, common to men and other animals; or whether it is with him the more exalted if indefinable conception called the soul. The first passage seems to subordinate it unduly; the second is indecisive until we are told that it is like Kynde. Since Kynde undoubtedly means God in this case, possibly we here touch the higher conception.

Conscience. If conscience is an animal function, subject to the will, we are likely to land in confusion; but probably in making its seat the head Langland did not intend to follow Galen any farther. Rather he views conscience as an intellectual faculty under Divine direction. He has drawn a broad line of demarcation between Anima and Conscience, whatever his reason may have been; and again it seems as though to him Anima could be little more than physical life.

The character of Conscience as a moral teacher is one of the most consistently treated in the poem. Conscience is of the counsel of Truth, and cannot be deceived. Holy Writ is his guide upon doubtful points, but he insists upon a true interpretation. He is guided by Reason (C, V., 5) but is free to enlighten Reason before the latter

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gives his decision (C, V., 33). Their respective functions would seem at first to be those of counselor and magistrate, but eventually Reason is appointed chancellor, and Conscience royal justice (C, V., 185), thus assigning them the same functions, but giving Reason the higher station. Again Reason is a pope, and Conscience bearer of his crosier (C, VI., 113). Thus Conscience seems to be made subject to the Bible, the Church and Reason.

Throughout the rest of the poem, Conscience is the personal adviser, guide and director of men, and leader of the forces of Holy Church. It is always therefore that enlightened intellectual faculty which judges and directs with regard to moral matters; appearing most often as the accuser and public prosecutor of Wrong.

Wit. We have next to distinguish Conscience or Inwit from Wit pure and simple. In Will's search for Dowel he follows a logically ascending scale of inquiry. First he meets Thought, and after receiving some information is directed to Wit; from Wit he passes to his wife, Study. Wit and Study should result in learning, and accordingly Study soon refers Langland to Clergy, whose wife, Scripture, (interpreted written knowledge) she has instructed (C, XI. and XII). Advancing in this line of intellectual development, Langland raises so many objections to some of the teachings received that he is finally accused of seeking knowledge only to cavil at it, and further knowledge is refused him. This is true in all the texts except A. In this (Passus XII) Scripture takes pity on Will, and directs him to her cousin, Kynde Wit; a proceeding that is apparently, in one sense, sending him back whence he started.

This sequence, with the exception of the fifth step of A, XII., which may be simply an inadvertence, becomes reasonably clear when examined by the light of the later definition of faculties. By comparing texts B and C, Thought is identified with *Mens* (C, XVII., 185; B, XV., 25), and Mens was defined as the mind, the fundamental power which underlies all mental action. The only reference to Wit here given is in the definition of Sensus as "whenne ich fele that folke telleth" and "that is witte and wisedome the welle of alle craftes." From this it appears that Wit means the mind as applied to the perception of truth, either mental or physical. Thought is the instrument, Wit its natural use. Wit applied to books becomes Study; the books are Scripture; the result of the application is Clergy.

What, then, is meant by Kynde Wit if it is not synonymous with Wit as already defined? The way to it is to be pointed out by the guide "Prove-all-things," until the seekers reach the burg, "Hold-fast-that-which-is-good." This seems to be the road to natural

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wisdom, or common sense, as distinguished from clergy; the wisdom of experience; and probably this is the answer to the question.

Reason. Reason is defined as the faculty which may "deme domes and do as treuthe techeth" and this is in general consistent with the character as introduced through the poem. It is a righteous judge which interprets and applies law, particularly the law of God. In this capacity is its first appearance at the trial of Meed, and Conscience is accuser, also according to the formal definition. Reason, the preacher (C, VI., 114), interprets the law with reference to the pestilences, and the duty of men in relation thereto.

There is temporary confusion between reason and instinct when Langland wonders why reason gives to animals more assistance than to men; as though he really believed that animals could ponder and decide. But in reproving Langland for his questions (C, XIV., 196) Reason appears as judge; and even his silent departure with Piers Plowman from the dinner of Clergy, Conscience and the Doctor (C, XVI., 151) may be interpreted as a decision.

In summary, mind is that which receives knowledge; wit the channel through which knowledge comes, conscience the perception of it as right or wrong, reason the judge of its actual value, study is a second means used to obtain it (the first is wit or natural observation or perception); nature is one source of information, scripture another; the result from the first source of information is Kynde Wit, from the second, clergy.

Free Will. The greatest difficulty lies in interpreting Langland's conception of Free Will in the relation implied between Free Will and the other faculties. In the C-text Free Will is made the fundamental power, of which all the other faculties are manifestations; while in the B-text, Anima is the fundamental, and Free Will is not mentioned at all until we come to the description of the tree of Charity, which grows in a garden, the heart, in man's body; and Free Will is the farmer of that garden under Piers Plowman. In each text Free Will is the defender of the fruit of the tree against the Fiend; but in the C-text he acts in addition for a long time as preacher, teacher and guide. It is perhaps consistent to make Free Will a guide; but as to the other attributes here ascribed, it seems that Langland must be enlarging a certain part of his definition (that which will or will not do good deeds or evil, or that which turns from evil to the good) so as to make it cover the whole field of Conscience and Reason. In doing this he has lost sight of the distinctive function of the will, that of choosing, perhaps because he thinks that a choice involves the exercise of reason, conscience and the other faculties. In short it appears that he has come to a false conclusion with regard to the

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nature of the will; and that the power he ascribes to it should really be ascribed to the soul, Anima; and we have here a further reason for supposing that with him the name Anima means simply vital action. This conception of Anima is consistent with so much of his Latin original as he gives in English; but in itself and in its relation to the will it is not consistent with the meaning of the passage as he gives it in Latin. I conclude that he may sometimes be at fault as to the meaning of terms, but that having taken his stand, whether upon a misconception or otherwise, he stands with reasonable firmness and is in general consistent with himself. And the clearest exposition of mental science in the fourteenth century was not likely to be particularly clear to one who approached the subject in a casual way, with the sole object of adding a new illustration to a popular treatment of an entirely different subject.

The Form of the Poem.

Visions. It has been said that a park and a vision constitute the stock mechanism of the literary compositions of the fourteenth century. Langland's method differs from the conventional method in that it makes more of the vision and less of the park than is usual. The whole work is a series of visions, and the moments of waking are so few and unimportant as scarcely to be noticeable. Where they are noticeable, they are often suggestive of the park, that is of the outer air, of the free life that the author must have lived at some early time; they breathe an atmosphere of the hills and woods, though even in this respect they produce an effect that is still conventional.

At other times the visions suggest what is not at all conventional: that the author's contemplative habits were productive of sluggishness. It seems strange that a person of his reverent habits should twice represent himself as going to sleep in church, unless such an occurrence was not altogether unknown in his actual experience; and we are reminded of Sloth who went to sleep during his own confession.

From another standpoint the structure of the poem as a series of visions is fortunate. Langland's work, regarded as a whole, lacks consistency; whether we take into account the central character or the minor ones; and even where he strove to secure consistency, we have seen that his success was not complete. But in a vision, entire consistency is not necessary; and in a series of them, the way is open for the author to follow his fancy whither he will, and to cast to the winds all the rules of unity and proportion and sequence; while we

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still have no difficulty in gathering the specific lessons which Langland teaches in specific places.

Through the whole composition it is evident that the poem was really a growth, not a structure; or if a structure, put together in a childlike way; and the efforts to reduce it to structural beauty and proportion, while partly successful, were an afterthought.

Allegory. After the visions the allegories are the most prominent features, and here again Langland is following the example of others. But Langland carries his personifications farther than any other has done, except Bunyan; while he deals largely with the abstract and the ideal, he loves to make it as concrete and as tangible as possible.

Quotations. There is really more of originality and more of the spirit of the coming Reformation in his liberal use of quotations. His purpose was twofold; to show that his own teaching was in no sense revolutionary, but in accordance with the standard of the church; and to make the teaching of the church plain to all. To this latter end he translated the passages used, interpreted, commented, or preached from them as texts, and in a homely fashion that the simplest could understand. And while he could not place the Bible itself in the hands of the people, he did what he could toward that end, and approved the efforts of those who aimed to do more. Looking at the quotations simply, we might regard the whole poem as a series of sermons bearing upon daily duty as the chief topic, and even the metrical form and the imagery were well adapted to make the sermons effective; probably more so than Langland knew when he began to write.

Similes and Proverbs. The poem abounds in similes, proverbs, parables and puns, of which a fairly complete list is given in the index to Professor Skeat's edition. From Langland we may learn the origin of many expressions that are current in popular speech, if not in literature; as for instance, the supposedly profane expression "not worth a curse," proves to be the eminently fit and sensible remark, "not worth a cress" (C, XII., 14). Others especially striking are, "to have pepper in the nose" (B, XV., 197) for, to be angry; "measuring the mist on Malvern Hills" (C, I., 163) as preferable to meeting an attorney without money in hand; the familiar and mysterious saying, "as dead as a doornail" (C, II., 184), and the negative and ironical expressions, "as courteous as a hound in a kitchen" (B, V., 261), "as becometh a cow to hop in a cage" (R, III,, 262). These sayings and proverbs almost without exception wear the aspect of current coin of the realm, and add to the effectiveness of the pictures of common life.

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Parables. Many of the parables are directly Scriptural. Of others one of the most pleasing and instructive is that of the merchant and the messenger (C, XIV., 33) which is probably Langland's own, and is no less significant literally than figuratively in regard to what may be called the laws of the road. Short but exceedingly happy is the friar's illustration of the wagging boat (C, XI., 32) by which it is conclusively shown how one may meet with many mishaps in religious life and yet be saved.

Puns. Plays upon words are not so numerous as might be expected. As good as any, though probably not original, are the comparison of *words* and *worts* (vegetables; B, V., 162), and that carried out at length (C, XVIII., 200) where the cross upon the reverse of the red noble is said to take the place of the cross of Christ in the worship of many.

The riddles, parables and puns illustrate rather Langland's close relation to the people than the peculiar character of his mind. Where the thought is more elevated they are fewer, but they sometimes occur where Langland is pressing most earnestly forward; and in such places they are evidently spontaneous and unstudied. This can hardly be said of such efforts as that to illustrate the difference between reward and bribery by the relations of grammar.

Structure of Allegory. The general structure of the allegory is as follows: First we have a picture of the world, which is given over to the lust for money and to the seven deadly sins. Those who realize the condition of affairs and long for a better estate are guided in their search for it by a humble plowman, until they learn that deliverance lies in Dowel. The author, as one of them, then begins a search for Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, as three stages of the way to holiness, and in the search meets various personages who question his motive, the road he is taking, his haste to reach the end of his journey. Each affords him all the help possible, but all are not in agreement. Finally attention is directed to Christ and His teaching as the culmination of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest; His crucifixion and resurrection are related; Conscience becomes the leader of His forces upon earth, and is sore besieged by Anti-Christ.

Allegorical Names. A minor point noticeable in Langland's method is the length of the names often bestowed upon persons and places. Piers Plowman's wife (C, X., 80) is "Work-when-time-is;" her daughter, "Do-right-so-or-thy-dam-shall-thee-beat;" her son, "Suffer-thy-sovereigns-have-their-will-, judge-them-not-, for-if-thou-do-thou-shalt-dearly-pay." In one instance (C, VII., 310) the name of a Welshman extends for several lines.

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Obscurities. In its final form, the poem contains many obscurities due to various causes; some of them grammatical merely and due to carelessness or oversight. One passage seems faulty in every text (C, IV., 77-89, and parallels) because of the omission of the chief verb; but the fault in this case does not lead to obscurity. Lack of consistency in characterization is another source of difficulty; another seems due to sheer forgetfulness, as when the author goes to sleep on Malvern Hills and wakes up in London; in interpolating a passage he has neglected to ascertain what was the scene of the part into which it was interpolated. Lastly may be mentioned the riddles. What is intended as a puzzle may not be open to criticism because it is puzzling, but at least one of these is now inexplicable (B, XIII., 150-156; Skeat, Notes, 196) because of the impossibility of tracing the contemporary references. But Langland's puzzles and inconsistencies are not greater than those of Gower, who introduces into his work matters irrelevant or contradictory and illustrations that fit "as the fist does the eye" (Ten Brink, Eng. Lit., p. 135); and if Gower represents uninspired scholarship, Langland's humble inspiration without scholarship is preferable.

The Spirit of the Poem.

Influences Upon the Poem. Langland is distinguished from his great contemporaries as being of the priesthood and people, but not of the court; and this might be inferred from his language. Latin is used freely, while French appears but seldom, and French influence is slight, appearing about equally in language and subject matter. The growing lack of appreciation of French and the French people among the lower classes is clearly reflected, although Langland probably did not share in it himself. With regard to his subject, there was no other than a religious one for Langland with his narrower horizon when even Gower and Chaucer with their wider range of thought were constrained to treat it: Chaucer lightly and satirically, a touch here and there, Gower with all the intensity of which he was capable in the "Vox Clamantis." For Langland living in the fourteenth century and close to the hearts of the people as well as to their unhappy lives there was but one voice, the same voice of one crying in the wilderness, uttered in the language of the people. How far-reaching were the results of this utterance we may only infer from the popular uprisings that accompanied and the Reformation that followed it, though both uprisings and Reformation were led by others. Its poetic form was that usually chosen by those who had a message for the people not to be delivered from the pulpit; the form

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which would ensure its sinking deep and circulating widely. And even in returning toward the Old English standard in the structure of his verse, Langland was not merely rejecting the newer French fashions; he was appealing still more directly to the popular sympathy.

Purpose. Langland, having convictions, believed it his duty to teach them to the people, and deliberately chose means to this end. His sole reference to his authorship of poetry, his "makynges" (B, XII., 15-29), speaks of it as recreation, resorted to that he may be more perfect in his more serious duties; and he quotes to his questioner, in justification, the examples of holy men. But this is merely deprecation. It occurs in the B-text, which must have been written after a conviction fully formed that this was the serious work of his life; and the holy fathers referred to were not in the habit of wasting even their moments of recreation in work that had no serious purpose. Langland felt that he must speak; and his first utterance was dictated by the desire to speak to the people as they spoke to each other, or as they were addressed by those who showed most power to interest them; and with this restriction, the Vision of Piers Plowman was, in its earlier form, a spontaneous outpouring.

Earnestness. Of its earnestness and depth of feeling with, as well as for, those in bondage to sin, harsh laws and a corrupt clergy, there can be no doubt. Scarcely another quality could be so profusely illustrated as this. Langland has his lighter moments as we shall see; but through all his purpose is distinct; and though he may cause others to smile, the smile is never reflected upon his own face. Through his pages, as through the streets of London, he strides, turning not to give place to any, making obeisance to none; we may laugh or we may tremble at his words, but while we laugh or tremble, he has passed on about the business whereto his Master sent him.

Insight. His practical insight, as distinguished from his philosophical insight, was great. He sees the good about him as well as the evil; there are worthy as well as criminal poor; there are charitable bishops as well as avaricious ones. But the good needs not the same emphasizing as the bad, and does not receive it. The causes of evil as well as the evil itself are apparent to him; he finds them not only in high places, but among the people themselves; not king and church only are responsible for lack of bread, but often the careless improvidence of the breadwinners. And if he does not suggest cures for all that needs cure, he points out a better road, a road that has since been followed, the way of Holy Writ; and most of all, he avoids the way of communism and anarchy, even though many thought they read of it in his work and some therefore ventured to walk in it.

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The Prophecies. As to his insight into the future a question may fairly be raised. He believed it impossible to forecast, and yet has sometimes used the style of prophecy, though whether in earnest or in satire it is not always easy to say. One such passage (C, IV., 440-485) is rather a picture of what Langland hopes for than a prediction that it will take place. The picture bears a general resemblance to the millennium, and to show that it is distant he says that all Jews and Saracens shall first be converted. Another passage of similar character describes the time when Wrong may be pardoned (C, V., 108). Another (C, IX., 348-355) Professor Skeat believes to be merely a satire upon mysterious forms of prophecy then in vogue; it refers to a time of famine and pestilence when Death shall withdraw and Dearth be justice and Dawe the ditcher shall die for default (of food) unless God of His goodness grant us a truce. It contains an inexplicable riddle and a reference to the malign aspect of Saturn, and is almost too astrological to be seriously spoken.

But there is no doubt as to the seriousness of a passage which contains no riddles nor astrology (C, VI., 169):—

And yet shall come a king and confess you all
And beat you as the Bible telleth for breaking of your rule,
And amend you, monks, nuns, and canons,
And put you to your penance, *to return to your former state*,*
And barons and their children blame you and reprove,
Some trust in chariots and some in horses. . . . They are brought down and fallen.
Friars in their refectory shall find at that time
Bread without begging to live by ever after,
And Constantine shall be their cook and coverer of their church;
For the Abbot of England, and the abbess his niece
Shall have a knock on their crowns, and incurable the wound;
The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers.... with a continual stroke,
But before that king shall come as chronicles tell,
Clerks and holy church shall be clothed new.

Here, though Langland may show no prophetic insight, simply enunciating, as Professor Skeat says, an opinion generally current with reference to the power of the king, the expression must remain noteworthy, both for its power and dignity and for the manner in which it was fulfilled in the time of Henry VIII.

Independence and Courage. Langland's independence of opinion and judgment is attested in every line of his work. As to the proclaiming of his convictions, which must often have had to do with individuals as well as doctrines, his practice varies. Sometimes he hesitates to push his teaching to its logical conclusion, exclaiming that

* Italicised passages are in Latin in original.

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he dares not (B, pr., 209), or that he that speaks most truly is soonest blamed; while again he challenges the acts of the bishop of Syria who looks like a real individual (C, XVIII., 278), impeach s the king himself (C, IV., 210), and fears not the death at the stake (B, XV., 81).

Conservatism. But the key to it all lies in his conservatism. It is not that he ever fears to speak because of any personal danger that may come to him; for religious persecution had not yet become severe, and he is most daring with regard to political matters where perhaps the danger of free speech was greatest, at least to those outside of the church. He hesitates to speak because he does not wish to disturb the established order, political or religious, but only to eradicate the abuses that have crept in; and if he should say all that he might, he might incite men to deeds that he does not approve, and be held responsible for a meaning and for results that he does not intend.

Imaginativeness and Originality. His imaginative faculty is fanciful rather than inventive, and is not strongly developed even in that direction. He sees facts and can depict them; he can reproduce pictures that others have painted, with slight variations of detail that serve to simplify rather than to elaborate; but in the domain of actual invention he is not at home. In his passages pertaining to Heaven and Hell, he leaves no actual picture in our minds, but simply enumerates the matters he wishes to bring before us. But in approaching nearer to things terrestrial the play of his fancy becomes greater and his work correspondingly more artistic.

Accordingly, his originality consists chiefly in the independence of view already mentioned, and in the vividness and power with which he treats of familiar matters, particularly those derived from his own experience. As to the actual subject matter, apart from his method of treatment, there is little or nothing not directly traceable to some outside source, except these facts of experience; and even his method is often borrowed. It is because of this that we learn that he had read some books, and seen some things that he never mentions directly. This is of course practically restating that his work shows fancy rather than imagination. The character called Imaginative shows less of imaginativeness than any other if that be possible, it is purely didactic; while many others are introduced with personal description.

Attitude toward Women. Langland's allusions to women are in proportion few, whether allegorical or real. The Lady Meed is first and most conspicuous; the female penitent representing Pride, Study, Scripture, Holy Church, Anima, and some minor characters practically complete the list. To these may be added a few references to his own wife and daughter, and to the women of London. His attitude toward the least of them is respectful; and in what he

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says of Study and of his own wife he gives rise to the suspicion that in their presence he was humble as well as respectful. His feminine characters are no more puppets than are his masculine ones; he endows them with characteristics equally positive, we may say equally masculine; and from the lack of femininity we might infer either that Langland knew little of women, or that those he knew best were of an exceedingly positive type. In the familiar yet respectful leavetaking between Will and Scripture (A, XII., 38-48) we doubtless have the custom of the time.

Wit, Satire, Humor. The satire in Langland's work constitutes one of its strongest and most entertaining characteristics, naturally most often manifested in the attacks upon wrong, but in all its intensity never anything but kindly and wholesome. Usually the subject is treated in a manner too incisive to be called humorous, though always witty if we make the formal distinction (See Hunt, Eth. Teachings in O. E. Lit., p. 248); but the sense of humor is often present and sometimes becomes so prominent that the reader must smile, though he may never suspect the author of smiling. Of such a character is Meed's half-text (C, IV., 489) to which Conscience supplies the important remainder giving the true meaning; Avarice's interpretation of restitution to mean robbery (C, VIII., 234-238); the friar's ready claim that Dowel dwells with "ous freres" (C, XI., 18), and the knight's assistance of Piers against Wastour, which was so exceedingly "courteous as his kind would" as to be entirely ineffectual. Many descriptive passages are characterized by a sustained humor throughout, as the description of Sloth and Glutton, and the account of the doctor at dinner (C, XVI).

Descriptive Power. The portion of the poem which is most often referred to, the description of the field full of folk, is not so good from an artistic standpoint as many others; it is more interesting as illustrating the character of Langland's imagination and giving a hint at what the completed poem is to be. It is a catalogue rather than a picture; yet the field and the tower and the deep dale are so clearly defined that our imagination completes what Langland left unfinished; and the highest art could do no more. The proposed marriage and the trial of Lady Meed which follow are again less remarkable for accuracy than for force; the force due to earnestness of intention, and what may be termed massiveness of presentation, and the effect heightened by the striking transition from country to city.

But when we reach the confessions of the seven deadly sins, Langland's work cannot be surpassed for wit and for close accuracy of portraiture. The scenes already mentioned may have been founded

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on events that came under Langland's observation but infrequently; a miracle play, a wedding on some country estate, a trial at Westminster; but now we are dealing with matters that touch his daily experience.

Only quotation can do justice to the personal descriptions here given; as for example that of Avarice, with his beetle-brows, thick lips, flabby cheeks, half-shaven chin, head twice covered with hood and with hat, and garment so threadbare as to be an unsafe promenade for insects. The account of the means by which Avarice made his money follows, and is so circumstantial as to prove beyond a doubt that Langland was speaking whereof he knew; and the length with which he dwells upon this topic shows it to be a favorite one.

The best character sketch of the entire poem is that which follows, the description of Glutton (C, VII., 350) at the tavern. Glutton may not be in his own person so much of a wit as the Sir John Falstaff to whom Professor Skeat compares him; but he shows many similar characteristics, and will serve well as the literary predecessor of Sir John. The glutton of Shakespeare's day was undoubtedly a more intellectual animal than the glutton of Langland's time. The account of the game of barter at the tavern (the Freimarkt), the subsequent fate of Glutton, and his tardy repentance give a most graphic and amusing picture of the common life of common people on its lighter side.

Of a different character, but still witty and diverting, is the account of Piers Plowman in the field and his efforts to make some use of several of the repentant sinners, who prove to be obstinate and unmanageable. Yet the author never relaxes for a moment, nor does he allow his reader to forget the terrible earnestness that underlies it all; and not the least charm of his wit and satire is its apparent unconsciousness.

We come to a picture of the darker side (C, X., 71), of the sufferings of the very poor, spoken no longer in satire but in the keenest pity, the pity of one who had perhaps himself known what it was to lack food and fire and covering:—

> Ruth is to read, or in ryme shew
> The woe of these women that dwell in cots,
> And of many other men that much woe suffer,
> Both a-hungered and a-thirst, yet turn the fair outward
> And are abashed to beg.

Moving as it is, we feel grateful to Langland for giving as an obverse to the tales of tricksters and cheats this picture of poverty, abject, but honest and self-respecting.

The account of the dress and habits of Haukyn is less striking than those mentioned, chiefly because of the more free introduction of

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allegorical teaching. From this point on, the religious teaching becomes more and more prominent, and the descriptions carry with them a greater weight of meaning and become in this sense more impressive. Langland is not a Milton, yet he can rise to a certain simple sublimity of his own that is suggestive of Bunyan, if not of Milton. There is much in the mechanism of the poem that suggests Bunyan; as the account of the castle of Anima, and the adventures on the way to Kynd Wit (A, XII., 56). The author's dramatic power is shown in the account of the dinner of Conscience, Clergy and the Doctor with Reason; even the Latin is not without its effect here, though the appearance of Piers Plowman is forced and unnecessary. Of the remaining portions, the most noteworthy from our present point of view are the account of the crucifixion (C, XX), the conquering of Hell (C, XXI), the building of Piers' barn (C, XXII), and in fact the whole of the last passus, which shows more of originality if not more of power than the account of the harrowing of hell.

In summary Langland's descriptive power is noticeable, as might be expected, in those things with which he was most familiar,—scenes of common life in city or country, and the things in which he was most deeply interested,—the passion and mission of Christ. Of actual invention there is little; and his power, while unquestionable, is not due to any attempt at art, but is incident to the directness and earnestness of his purpose. As examples of his most artistic work at its two extremes, I prefer the description of Glutton and that of the siege of Holy Church in the last passus, because in both the author himself is distinctly present, and the two most opposite sides of his character are clearly revealed: his brightest humor and his deepest sadness.

Scholarship. Touching the question of Langland's education and scholarship (See p. 234, and Ten Brink, Early Eng. Lit., p. 352) the list of Langland's positive attainments includes, besides English Grammar and English Law, Latin, and something of French; but nothing at all of Greek. He had access to a few books only, and beyond that source his knowledge was for the most part that which was common property among thinking men.

I find the total number of distinct quotations in the poem to be about 475. Of these, 368 are directly from the Vulgate, and 29 more are probably from the same source, but are inexactly given. Of the remaining 75, 11 are from the services of the church, 5 from Latin hymns, 5 from the Legenda Aurea of Jacobus de Voragine, 18 from the church fathers, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, and other church writers; 9 from the Disticha de Moribus ad Filium of Dion-

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ysius Cato, 3 from the Historia Scholastica of Peter Comestor, 2 and perhaps more from the Compendium of Peter Cantor; and one each from Boethius, Vincent of Beauvais, Juvenal, and others; besides several which Professor Skeat has been unable to trace, three or four of them in French in leonine verse, perhaps of Langland's composition. In addition there are a very large number of general allusions to these and other literary sources (See Piers Plowman, E. E. T. S. edition, Vol. IV., Section I., p. 512). Many of Langland's direct references to authorities are inexact, and he often gives the sense of authors quoted rather than their exact words, showing that reference to originals was not always easy; while the fewness of the errors in the references to the Vulgate speaks well for the power of his memory. It is probable that the list given comprises more works than were actually in Langland's reach, and that he knew most of the authors he cites from some collection of extracts. Especially do his references to the classics wear an aspect of being second hand.

Besides the few bits of French verse which may have been composed by Langland himself, there are several allusions and several resemblances of structure or action which suggest a knowledge of French works; especially Grosteste's "Chastel d'Amour," which may have been read in English translation, Huon de Meri's "Tornoiment de l'Antichrist," and Rutebuef's "La Voie de Paradis." Further, in many instances the scene and action of the poem show conclusively that Langland was familiar with the stage representations of religious mysteries.

His references to Greek authors are undoubtedly conventional or second hand (Plato, C, XII., 304; Aristotle, C, XV., 184). He mistranslates the name of Christ (C, XXII., 15), again misled by convention; and there was noticed an instance of departure from the exact meaning of a Latin original (Page 272). Occasionally he seems to have turned an ordinary saying into Latin on his own account, as if to give it greater weight.

From the preceding it seems that we may draw one new conclusion; that if these references and citations indicate the full scope of Langland's reading and literary training, his poetic faculty must certainly have been an inborn one. It is of course probable that he was familiar with English poetical versions of the legends and stories of which he makes continual use, as well as with popular versions of parts of the Scripture narrative, such as the Cursor Mundi, and the Miracle Plays. But the fact that he does not quote from these would indicate that he has received from them no distinct impression of poetical form, while the character of his versification and imagery and his return to alliteration furnish stronger evidence toward the

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same point. The church fathers could never have made Langland a poet; but a reflective habit and a sympathetic and earnest disposition aided by a ready ear, a quick wit, a retentive memory, and the study of men as well as of books, could and did.

His legal learning was extensive, appearing in the form of copious allusions to facts of law so exact as to indicate more than common familiarity. Many of these are of a character to be picked up easily by attendance at courts; others, such as the knowledge of legal forms, imply some study and practice. Perhaps he was more than a looker on at Westminister; at least he must have attended there, probably for the purpose of acquiring knowledge that would be of practical use outside, as well as a knowledge of human nature; and had any occupation offered itself there, he would doubtless have seized upon it and turned it to good account.

As to the source of Langland's literary and religious training, I find that in my own mind, in the light of the preceding investigation, opinion has deepened into positiveness that he never saw the inside of university walls, scarcely even as a casual visitor. The list just given of his positive attainments would not of itself afford satisfactory evidence on either side; what he knew he might have learned within a university, though a student as earnest and conscientious as Langland should it seems have learned more and learned it more systematically. And even if university training was not so systematic in Langland's time as it has since become, there is still nothing in Langland's stock of knowledge which he could not have gained in the ordinary monastic schools and from contact with men.

But the strongest argument is that there is nowhere in either text the slightest reference to any university, or the slightest reflection of university life. The scene of the poem taken as a whole does reflect, unless with this exception, all the life that Langland had presumably lived; there are the fields and hills and streams of his boyhood days, and there are the crowded streets and questionable tavern society of London, the greedy crowd of the law court, and the reverent throng at the church. There is ample support for the common theory as to Langland's connection with the church and his position in it. If therefore we find all this reflected even to detail, and know that to Langland the place of study was a heaven upon earth, I cannot escape the conclusion that even a brief experience of university life would have so impressed itself upon his mind that we should have evidence of it again and again. Not finding this evidence I conclude that Langland's education, after a comparatively early age, was due to his own unaided efforts. A self taught man might easily feel the pride in a little knowledge of grammar and of French that he allows

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himself to show; yet a diligent man among such associations as his might learn all that he knew. That he did develop himself so fully in despite of difficulties, causes us to honor yet more highly the humble student who was greater than any learned doctor of his time, save one alone.

The Value of the Poem.

Past Influence, and present estimate.

The influence of the Vision concerning Piers the Plowman in helping to bring about a political upheaval that pointed the way to a religious revolution is historical and needs no restatement. Wyclif quoted from Langland, and both Langland and Wyclif were misinterpreted by many wrong headed ones whose efforts to hasten the coming of Langland's millennium, when "shall neither king nor knight, constable nor magistrate, overburden the commons," materially retarded its advance. Thus the greatest immediate influence of the work was in a direction that its author neither contemplated nor desired; but though centuries were needed for the accomplishment of its true purpose and that accomplishment involved more than the dreamer dreamed, we may feel that Piers Plowman did return to Holy Church and that the work of Langland was the first step toward his returning.

To us the work is of immeasurable value as a storehouse of information; and the feeling of each student of it must be that a lifetime is scarcely sufficient for the full interpretation of a work upon the mere text of which one scholar has already expended half a lifetime.

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